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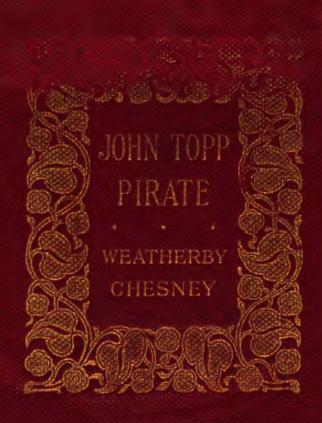
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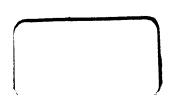
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JOHN TOPP PIRATE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ENGINEER
THE ADVENTURES OF A SOLICITOR
THE DILEMMA OF COMMANDER BRETT
FOUR RED NIGHTCAPS

JOHN TOPP PIRATE

BY

WEATHERBY CHESNEY

METHUEN & CO. 36 ESSEX STREET W.C. LONDON

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JOHN TOPP PIRATE

CHAPTER I

SWORN SHIPMATES

"HO, ho, John Topp!" said the boys, "you daren't tackle him, that's what it is. The stranger can thrash you, and you know it."

Now, I knew nothing of the sort, and, in fact, rather fancied that I could thrash Alexander Ireland as easily as I had every other boy in Whitby; but the others were jealous of my prowess, and therefore egged me on to tackle the stranger, in the hope that he might prove too smart for me. For thus their broken noses and lost teeth would be avenged.

I was at that time a bull-necked, squarely-built young lout of fifteen, and Alec was red-haired, slender, and wiry, and about six months my senior. I was the best fighter in Whitby—even Dan Asquith, the squint-eyed butcher's boy, said so—and I had a reputation to lose. Alec was a newcomer to the town, and had none.

"Come on, carroty-head!" I cried, stung at last into action by the jeers which I affected to despise. "They tell me you are a good fighter; let's see which of us two is to be cock.'

A

But the stranger kept his hands in his pockets.

"Why should I fight?" he asked gravely. "I haven't quarrelled with you."

"Afraid?" said I contemptuously. "Right! say I can beat you, and you shan't have your thrashing."

"No," he replied steadily, "I won't say so. I'm not afraid of you, but I don't choose to fight for nothing."

"That's all brag," I said, as I edged up to him. "You've either got to fight or acknowledge you're afraid," and I gave him a shove with my shoulder.

"All right, then, I'll fight."

And without more words we stripped and set to.

Now, though in the very first minute I sent him sprawling on the grass, I saw as soon as his hands went up that I had undertaken to tame a much tougher adversary than Butcher Dan. I had the advantage of the stranger in the matter of brute strength, but he had on his side science such as we Whitby boys had never seen, and it more than compensated for his lack of muscle. He used his legs a great deal as he fought, dancing round and round me, and sparring lightly with his hands, so that when I pressed him hard he generally managed to retreat just out of range of my heaviest buffets; and when it was my turn to flag a little he would rush in and rain his blows on me so quickly that several times I was fairly bewildered and let him pass my guard. He had not much weight, but every ounce of what he had was behind his fist, and his hand fell heavily when he did get in a straight one.

Now and then by sheer force of weight I broke through his guard and grassed him, but he generally contrived to give me back as good as he took.

And so for an hour and a half by the church clock the fight went on, each of us doggedly determined to come up to the mark so long as his trembling knees would support him, but each at the same time secretly hoping that the next knock-down blow the other received would bring the fight to an end. For the spectators it was a splendid battle, and very soon a big crowd gathered round our ring, and almost as many of them shouting for Ireland as for me; for in spite of the fact that he was a stranger, they could not help admiring his pluck. Besides, my many previous victories had won me not a few foes, who would be glad to see me taken down a peg, even though they had to get a stranger to do it for them.

At last the end came, and it was Ireland who struck the knock-out blow. How many rounds we fought I do not know, but at last I felt that unless I could finish him off quickly I should not be able to toe the mark next time the umpire called "Time!" So, summoning up all my failing energies for one last slashing blow, I rushed at him like a mad carthorse.

He did not flinch, but stood his ground waiting for me.

Dodging my blow, he seized my left hand with his right, ducked his head under my arm, whipped his other hand between my legs, and before anyone could tell exactly what had happened, I had flown

JOHN TOPP PIRATE

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over his head and was lying on the ground with all the wind knocked out of me like the corn out of a burst bag. It was all done in less than a couple of seconds, and as I had fallen on my head, I lay quiet enough.

Alec put on his coat again, and started to walk away from the ring; but before he had taken three steps he was seized roughly by some of my supporters, who accused him of foul play. The matter very nearly ended in a general battle, for some of the spectators thought the throw was a foul one, while others stuck out that it was perfectly fair; and as the first party were in a large majority, the bruised and bleeding conqueror stood every chance of being ducked in the river as a reward for his victory.

By this time, however, having a fairly thick skull, and being well used to having it banged about, I had begun to come to my senses again; and when I gathered what was going on, I struggled to my legs (which were shaking under me like sea-weeds) and rated the disputants for being such poor sportsmen.

"Alec Ireland," I said, turning to my victorious adversary, who was held fast by three or four big ruffians, "I own you have given me a drubbing. Will you shake hands?"

When his captors saw how I took the matter they let him go, and he seized my hand with a hearty grip.

"No, no," he said; "you had the best of it but for the last fall; and if it hadn't been for that Southcountry trick by which I lifted you over my shoulder, I should have had to knuckle under."

Of course I denied this, but he insisted it was true, and paid me so many other compliments on my fighting, that in fact he gave me a lesson in courtesy which I probably needed a good deal more than I did the thrashing that had preceded it; though my father would no doubt have told me that that, too, was by no means wasted.

Such was the beginning of my friendship with Alexander Ireland. On that very night we took together the solemn sailors' oath by which we became sworn shipmates for life—and to this day we have neither of us broken it. Many a time since then have our hands been raised with weapons in them, but never in anger with one another; always side by side or heel to heel against a common enemy.

My new friend and I quickly found that we had a great deal in common. The perils and pleasures of the sea had always had an enthralling fascination for me, and when I discovered that Alec shared my passion for salt water, my previously vague longings became suddenly crystallised into a definite purpose. I would be a sailor.

It soon became the greatest enjoyment of my leisure time to sit in the dark little parlour of the Angel, and listen to the tales of the old seamen who frequented it—tales of the great captains they had known and sailed under, who, caring as little for the violence of the tropical hurricane as for the deadly

ice-grip of the cold North, had braved the storms of unknown oceans in their stout little ships, and had brought back from every clime its choicest treasures, to lay them at the feet of our Sovereign Lady, Good Queen Bess.

Their stories of profitable barter with dusky races, and weird yarns of the marvellous beasts and uncanny reptiles they had seen in lands where no white foot till theirs had ever trod, filled me with awe-struck admiration for their daring, and haunted my dreams at night. But above all I loved the fights—the wild sea-fights with Spaniard, Portingale, or Frenchman; and every fibre in my body would tingle, and every drop of blood run hot with excitement as I listened.

The grizzled old salts were long-winded and garrulous enough over their mugs of ale, but their rough experiences had taught them better how to kill an enemy than how to describe the killing of him, and in consequence the tales were badly told, but my imagination, filling in the details of their rough sketches, would bring the whole picture vividly before me.

I could see the first view of the enemy, the chase, the clearing of the decks for action; I could hear the din of the artillery as the vessels closed with one another, and the rasping of the timbers as the little English ship ran alongside a lofty galleon of Spain; then the hoarse shouts as our fellows boarded; the crack of the pistols and the clash of the swords in hand-to-hand fight, and every now and then the sickening thud as some brave seaman fell dead upon

the deck, until finally the English pluck and skill and strength prevailed against the greater numbers of the foe, and the battle was over.

I have given and taken hard blows in many such a fight since those days—as I shall in this story have occasion to narrate—but of all the fierce battles in which I have had a share, not one seems to me now in the recollection more real than do those boyish dream-fights at the Angel.

There was, however, one thing—and that no small one—over which Alec and I very nearly quarrelled. And what should that be if not a woman? For it is woman's bright smile and coyly drooping eye which shatter half the friendships of man with man, even when the longed-for down has hardly yet appeared on the upper lip, and the razor is still a joy to be gloated over in secret.

Inez was her name, and she was the daughter of Don Miguel, a Spanish gentleman who had, for a reason which I did not then know, taken up his residence in Whitby. I had known her since she was a child of ten, and had never thought of her more than of any other girl in Whitby, until one day I chanced to see her in the street with a new gown on. It was a wonderful gown—the skirt of it was slashed and puffed out to the size of a forty-gallon cask—and as I looked and marvelled, it suddenly struck me that the laughing face above it was the most bewitching I had ever seen. Perhaps it was the fine dress that did it, and perhaps it was the pretty mouth that smiled and wished me a "good-day."

I am not sure which it was; but the next time I met her in the lane near her father's house, I asked her to be my sweetheart. After a few blushes (and a few kisses) she said she would, and I was the proudest lad in Whitby.

Alec, however, was not pleased at my success, and very soon he told me so.

"Jack," he said, "I didn't think my sworn shipmate would prove a traitor."

"A traitor!" I exclaimed. "It is a hard word, and I don't know what I have done to deserve it. How am I a traitor."

"What is there between you and the Spaniard's daughter?"

"She is my sweetheart," I said defiantly. "Is that where my treason lies?"

" Yes."

"Why," I cried with a troubled voice, "I didn't know you cared."

"You didn't know I cared! And after all our talks too! Haven't I told you often how I cared?"

"You never told me you cared for Inez," I replied stoutly; and I was sure he had not.

Alec burst out laughing. "You great fool!" he cried; "of course I don't care for Inez. How could you think I meant that? But," and he became suddenly grave, "she is a Spaniard, Jack. That is what I care about. That's where the treason is."

"I see no treason."

"No. But the Spaniards are the Queen's enemies, you and I have said we meant to fight for the Queen."

- " Inez is no one's enemy."
- "But her father, Don Miguel, is a Spaniard."
- "What have you against him? I have heard of nothing to his discredit."
 - "He is a Spaniard," he iterated.
- "Yes, I suppose he is. Is that all you have to accuse him of?" I asked, somewhat nettled at his persistence.
- "Isn't it enough? I tell you that every Spaniard is an enemy to England and Queen Bess; and since my father, Captain Harry Ireland, was murdered by the Spaniards, every Spaniard is an enemy to me."
- "And shall be to me, too," I said as I gripped his hand. "But I don't see that the rule applies to the daughters."
 - "Spanish daughters become Spanish mothers."
 - "Not when they marry Englishmen."
 - "Do you mean to marry Inez, then?" he said, looking at me earnestly.
 - "Yes, when I am old enough—if she will have me."
 - "No fear of her refusing a stout Englishman! Well, if that is so I will say no more, but I don't like it."

Alec thus agreed not to resist my intention, but I could see that he was displeased at what I was doing; and his displeasure at first angered and then grieved me. I began to wonder if my duty to my comrade required that I should give up Inez. No, I thought not; and besides, even if I had resolved to give her up, I think I should have failed when it came to the doing, for she had thoroughly bewitched

me. Finally I made up my mind that I would try to make him see her with my eyes. She could compel him to like her I knew—if only he would give her the chance.

"Alec," I said to him one day, "I'm going to see Inez to-night; will you come with me?"

He did not answer for a minute, and I could see that though he did not like to refuse me, he was very unwilling to say yes. It went against my grain to force him to anything he did not wish to do, but I knew he would thank me for it afterwards; so I waited patiently for his answer.

- "Do you really want me to go?" he asked at length.
 - "Yes, Alec, I do."
 - "Will her father be there?"
 - "No, we never see him in the evening."
- "Then if you are sure of that, I will go. But have you never guessed, Jack, why it is that you never see Don Miguel in the evening?"
 - "Because he is busy in his workshop."
 - "At what sort of work?"
 - "How should I know? I never asked him."
 - "I will tell you. He is an alchemist."
- "What?" I cried; "are you sure of that, Alec? Alchemy! why, it's the devil's own trade."
- "So they say; but to me it seems that if the devil had any favour for the work, alchemists would be richer than they are. It's an ill-trade though at best, and not the one I should choose for my comrade's father-in-law."

This news of Alec's troubled me; for though he declared that the devil could have no share in such profitless toil, yet I had always been told that every alchemist had sold himself to Satan, and I more than half believed it. Still, I argued that Inez was not to be blamed for her father's sins, and in the end Alec agreed with me.

After that night I never had any more disagreement with him on the subject of my love-making. Inez fairly laughed and sang herself into his good graces. She had the sweetest voice I ever heard; and as she sat in a corner by the fire and sang us quaint little sea-songs that her nurse had taught her, I wondered if the mermaidens that the old sailors of the Angel spoke of were one-half so sweet and pretty as my own little Spanish sweetheart.

"Why, Jack," said Alec, as we walked home from her house, "she is hardly a Spaniard at all, except for her black hair and eyes. No Whitby girl could have sung those English sea-songs with a prettier accent than she did."

"No Whitby girl could have sung them half so well," I answered warmly. "And as for her being English, her nurse has seen to that. She hates Spain almost as much as you do, and she won't allow Inez to speak a word of Spanish in her hearing."

"Well, she's a sweet girl, Jack, and I'm glad of it for your sake. It's a pity, though, that her father is a Spaniard."

I said nothing in reply to this, for, to tell the

truth, I was not much more in love with the surly Don Miguel than was Alec. By and bye as we walked Alec began to hum a tune, and after a short time he sang the words too. It was the last song Inez had sung to us, and I remember the chorus went like this:—

"Then ah! for the cruel creeping waves, With their clay-cold lips of spray; But hi! for the merry dancing waves, That with the sunbeams play."

"Take care, Alec!" I said with a laugh, "you'll be falling in love with Inez yourself."

"No, no, Jack; I like her, it is true, but I'll never be a rival to my sworn shipmate."

Nevertheless, when I said "Good-night" to him, and turned in at my father's gate, I heard him go singing down the road; and the words that came floating up the breeze to me sounded suspiciously familiar. It seemed to me that what he sang was

"Hi! for the merry dancing waves."

And the tune at any rate was the same.

CHAPTER II

GOLD-MAKING

BEFORE Alec's arrival on the scene, I grieve to say that, besides being one of the greatest dunces in the school, I was also, so the master said, the most troublesome young scapegrace he ever had the misfortune to cane. He told my father that he could not conscientiously take any blame to himself for my deplorable ignorance and depravity, as he would warrant that there was scarcely a square inch of my ungainly carcass that his ferrule or birchbroom had not scored. I was innately wicked, he declared; and my poor father groaned and said he feared the schoolmaster was right.

There was really some justification for this belief of my father's, for all my ten brothers (I was the youngest of eleven) were either doing well or giving promise of it, and I was the only one who had ever given my worthy parents the least trouble. The others were mostly parsons, or on the way to become parsons; so as my father too was in the Church, there was plenty of piety in the family; but I am very much afraid that the collective goodness of all my relatives was more than balanced by my individual depravity. I have heard my mother say—

and it has never occurred to me to doubt it—that the first use I made of my legs after I learned the art of locomotion, was to walk straight into a scrape. It is a habit I have not dropped with increase of years.

Now, however, I had for the first time a companion who, like myself, appeared to be happiest when in trouble, and for the next two years Alec and I continued to live in a state of intermittent rebellion against those in authority. We both hankered after excitement, and the pursuit of it continually led us into hot water. Now it would be a scuffle with his lordship's men for snaring his lordship's grouse, now a brawl in a tavern, and now a threat of severe punishment for scaring half the town with a turnip lantern on a dark winter's night. Once we went off for a whole week, and lived like conies among the hills; and on another occasion we hid ourselves in a ship's hold, and sailed down to Scarborough in her, and then tramped the whole way back over the moors on foot.

Adventures like these cemented our friendship, and taught us to be quick and ready in emergencies, but they did not tend to increase our popularity with those in authority; and to such an extent did our ill-repute spread that when anything went wrong, or any evil was committed of which the perpetrators were not at once discovered, every finger pointed to Alexander Ireland and John Topp as the culprits. And truth to tell, these judicial digits did not often point askew.

Alec indeed pursued his studies with some amount of diligence; but as for me, the perpetual war which I waged with the schoolmaster was far too bitter to admit of my profiting by his efforts to instruct me. I increased therefore in very little except stature, but in that I bid fair to be pre-eminent in Whitby.

My eventual sudden departure from the town was caused by the unexpected boiling-over of a pan of water; and this is how it came about.

I had gone to see my sweetheart Inez, and Alec had as usual accompanied me. He still took great pleasure in the sea-songs she used to sing to us; and besides, his presence was a help to our love-making, as he was always willing to converse with Dame Garrat, and so divert her attention from Inez and me when we happened to wish to speak of anything of an especially private nature. We had a pre-arranged system of signals by which I could always let him know when I wanted him to talk louder than usual; and to tell the truth, our knowledge of the code was in no danger of growing rusty from want of use.

On this particular night, however, the conversation had been of other times and places than our own. We had been discussing the marvellous wealth of the New World, and Alec and I had fought a wordy battle about the relative merits of glory and gold. He was all for glory, and I was for gold first, and glory only as an afterthought when the gold was safe below hatches.

"Jack," said Inez to me when Alec and I had, in our despair of converting one another, come to a controversial deadlock, "there are other ways of making gold than by fighting for it."

- "Yes, sweetheart, I know there are," I answered; "but you would not have me become a smug-faced merchant."
 - "No; but there are other ways still."
 - " How?"
 - "By alchemy."
 - "The devil's work!" I cried.
 - "My father's work, Jack," replied Inez gravely.
- "Yes, sweetheart, and I wish it were not," I began, when Alec interrupted me.
- "Jack, my boy, you're a fool. How can the devil have anything to do with it? The trade's respectable enough, though it doesn't seem to be very profitable to its professors—a sure sign, by the way, that it's an honest one."
 - " Jack," said Inez, "will you see for yourself?"
 - "Visit Don Miguel at his work?"
 - "Yes."
- "Not I!" I said with a shudder; "I should expect to be enchanted."

Alec, however, chaffed me for my superstitious fears, and said that nothing would please him better than to see how the work was done. Now to be called a coward in the hearing of my sweetheart was naturally more than I could stand, so I told Alec I would go with him.

Inez said there was a window in the pantry from which we could see Don Miguel's laboratory without his knowing that anyone was watching him, so we stationed ourselves there. Alec was all curiosity to see what was going on, but though I tried to conceal my fears, I was horribly afraid that some unholy sight would meet my eyes. From my cradle I have been taught that it is always safest to shun the devil and his works, and I believe it to be a thoroughly good rule.

Don Miguel's laboratory was a fearsome place. There were rows upon rows of retorts and flasks of various quaint shapes; shelves with big, dusty, learned-looking books on them; cases of bottles containing tinctures of various colours, both dull and bright; charcoal furnaces, and steaming vats of bubbling liquids. The floor was marked out into arcs, circles, triangles, and every sort of uncanny geometrical figure; and one corner of the room was entirely filled by a large blast furnace, over which Don Miguel was leaning, intently watching some substance that was hissing and gurgling in an earthenware crucible.

I thought I had never gazed upon such an unholy scene.

As we watched we saw that a critical point in the process had been reached. The Spaniard was trembling and muttering as he peered into the crucible whenever the dragon's breath of the furnace gave him light; and though we could not hear what he said, it was perfectly clear that he was wildly excited; unless, perhaps, it was the working of madness that we saw.

By and by he seemed to see the sign for which he

was looking. With a low cry of delight, more like the yapping of a dog than anything else, he stopped the furnace blast, and lit a rushlight candle. Then he took the crucible from the flames and poured the contents into another vessel.

For four or five minutes he held it up to the light, and during all that time, as he watched the silent workings of the hell-broth in the vessel, I never once saw his eyelids blink. Then he gave a wild, unearthly yell of delight, which made my very marrow run cold as though a tub of water had been thrown over me, and as his excited utterance became louder we could now hear what he said:—

"It turns! it turns! The colour! the lovely blood-red colour! See how it rises, red showing through the green! Success has come to me at last, and to-morrow I shall have gold! Gold! gold!! gold!!"

At this moment one of the flasks that had been gurgling and spluttering in another corner suddenly boiled over, and the liquid fell hissing on to the charcoal embers. A cloud of steam rose into the air, and at the sight, my overstrained nerves could bear the tension no longer, and I uttered a sharp cry.

The Spaniard heard it and it made him start involuntarily. Some of the decoction in the vessel he was holding splashed over and burnt his hand. With a yell of pain he let the vessel fall, and the precious essence was spilt on the floor, over which it ran in an oily stream, burning with a blue sulphurous

flame. He looked up at the window, saw our white scared faces peering at him, and with another yell, of rage this time, he snatched up a sword that was lying on a table and made for the door.

"Fly, Jack, fly! He'll murder you!" cried Inez, as she pushed me away from the window.

I snatched a hurried kiss and fled, and Alec with me.

Down the lane we ran with all the speed that fear gave us, and Don Miguel hard on our heels. We gained on him slightly, and taking advantage of the darkness, doubled and crouched down under the side of a haystack. He did not see our manœuvre, and we breathed more freely as the sound of his footsteps grew fainter in the distance.

"A near shave, that!" I said, as we made over some fields to avoid meeting the Spaniard as he returned.

"Yes," replied Alec, "but why did you run?"

"For the same reason as you did, I suppose," I answered, somewhat surlily.

" Afraid?"

"Yes, afraid. What of it?"

"It isn't like John Topp."

"John Topp fears no man," I said sharply; "but the devil I won't tackle."

"Jack, your superstition is childish," said Alec, gravely. "An angry Spaniard was the only devil I could see."

"Then for the matter of that, why did you run?"

"Partly because you did."

"Thanks! and the other reason? The angry Spaniard, eh?" I said, with a sneer.

"Yes Jack, the angry Spaniard."

"Then which of us is the coward, I'd like to know; you or I? I run from the devil, and I'm not ashamed to own it; you run from a man, because he's angry and has a sword in his hand, and apparently you are not ashamed to own that."

"That was not my reason," said Alec.

"No? Then what was it? Surely a very cunning one, for I quite fail to see it." It was my turn now, I thought.

"He's your sweetheart's father," replied Alec, simply.

I stopped dead. "Alec," I said, "I give you leave to hit me as hard as you like, straight from the shoulder, here on my blundering, stupid mouth;—a straight left-hander, mind! And I promise you I won't return the blow."

"No, thanks," replied Alec, with a laugh.

"I wish you would," I answered, penitently. "I deserve it for venturing to speak of cowardice and Alec Ireland in the same breath. Can you forgive me?"

"Of course I do," said Alec, with another laugh, and he wouldn't let me say another word about it. I saw though that he was hurt, and no wonder. When a man is acting from motives of pure chivalry, it is hard that his own sworn shipmate should accuse him of cowardice. I was thoroughly ashamed of myself, and even now the only excuse I can make

for my disloyal suspicions, is that the fearsome scene we had witnessed in the alchemist's laboratory had so scared me that I did not rightly know what I was saying.

It's a thin excuse though, at the best.

CHAPTER III

WILLIE TREHALION, BO'SUN

"ONE eye, one hand, and an otter-skin cap." That is my earliest recollection of Willie Trehalion.

Our first meeting took place when I was quite a youngster. He had come up to the vicarage on some errand or other, and when I told him my father was out, he said he would wait, and offered to pass the time in telling me a story for a pot of ale. I remember well, even now, how he grumbled at the poorness of the liquor I gave him; and to tell the truth, our small beer was exceedingly small.

On those occasions Willie was generous enough to admit that I could not fairly be blamed for the weakness of the brew, and would sit down on the bench outside the kitchen door, where, to pay for his drink, he would spin me such wonderful yarns of floating islands on which there lived magicians who sold winds, of mermaids and sea serpents, and other marvels of the deep, all of which he had himself seen in his travels, that I hung upon his words and thought him the greatest hero I had ever seen. And ofterwards whenever I met his squat, square figure

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rolling down the street he always had a nod or a cheery "How goes it, my young master?" for me—a piece of condescension which gave me more pleasure than did the most extravagant praise from any other quarter.

That my estimate of Willie's qualities was not altogether accurate was proved by the manner of his leaving Whitby.

One night, in a frolicsome mood, engendered no doubt, by liquors more potent than the vicarage beer, he attempted to break the constable's head. He had to sit in the stocks next day as a penalty for his joke, and thereafter disappeared from the town; and though I did not see him again for nearly eight years, I remembered his stories. But the man himself became a hazy phantom in my mind, until I met him again on the day after our adventure with the alchemist.

About mid-day Don Miguel had called at the vicarage, and asked to see my father. They were closeted together for a long time; and as I began to fear that this conjunction of the church with one of the devil's own favourites boded ill for my comfort presently, I went to tell Alec.

"Well," said he, "what can we do? We shall just have to take our punishment."

"Yes, I suppose so," said I, "but if I've to be punished, I don't see why I shouldn't have some fun first; and in any case it would be a shame to waste a fine afternoon like this at school."

"I does seem a pity," he replied, "and it will

be very hot and wearisome, with nothing to do but to pester old Prosody in his after-dinner sleep. Come on; let's do something else."

"Right. What shall we do?"

" Fish."

"The very thing! Then I can take a salmon as a present to Dame Garrat in the evening. She's apt to get sharp-tongued if I go too often emptyhanded to see Inez."

So we borrowed a boat and a net and set up the river at the second hour of the flood. We had just grounded our boat on the bank near the high bluff where the stream turns off to the north, and were busy making fast one end of our net on the shore, when we noticed that a stranger had taken up his quarters on the opposite bank.

He was a short, dark, sturdy man in the dress of a sailor. He wore loose knee-breeches with a short canvas smock over them, coarse blue worsted stockings, and shoes latched with brass buckles. Round his waist was a broad leather belt, into which was stuck a bone-handled sheath knife; on his upper spars was a huge brown, wide-sleeved, wide-skirted coat, with the tails looped up to be out of the way; and on his head was a cap of brown skin. He was standing in a twenty foot boat, which he had fitted with a house of canvas and wood, and was finishing his work by giving it all a generous coat of tar.

The figure seemed somehow familiar to me, and when I saw that the tar-pot hung from a hook which had been substituted for a right hand, the feeling that I ought to know the man grew stronger. Suddenly he broke out into a song, accompanying himself by beating a tattoo with the tar-brush on the top of the cabin. The song was one I frequently had heard Willie Trehalion bawl through the Whitby streets years ago, and it supplied at once the missing clue in my memory.

"Sail away,
Hack away,
Plunder! (Rap with tar-brush.)
Gather all the valuables you can.
Come back,
Nothing lack,
Thunder! (Rap.)
Scatter all the money like a man."

This one verse was solo and chorus both, and to begin singing the song was very much like starting to roll a big stone downhill; it was easy to start, but almost impossible to stop, till the voice, like the slope, was exhausted.

"Willie Trehalion, ahoy!" I cried, and the singer turned round to see who was calling.

He had not altered one jot since I saw him last. His face was browned by the sun, wrinkled by the winds, and purpled by strong liquors, and as this richness of colouring was in strong contrast to the rest of his head, which, underneath the protecting otter-skin cap, was as round and smooth as an ivory ball, the effect of the whole was distinctly striking. Add to this background of purple and white a globular blue nose, a jag for a mouth, an irregular

depression where the right eye should have been, and (always remembering the iron hook for a right hand), you have a fairly faithful picture of Willie Trehalion, bo'sun.

We pulled across to him, shooting the salmon net as we went.

- "How goes it, Willie?" I cried. "Don't you remember me?"
- "Master Topp, I warrant me! Growed to a stout lad since I see'd thee last, master, but the same face as Willie Trehalion left eight years ago last gull-egg season. It'll be scraped wi' a razor afore long, trust me. And who be this?"
 - "My sworn shipmate, Willie."
- "Sarvice to you, master; and his name, if I may be so bold?"
- "Alexander Ireland," I said. "Came to Whitby since you left."

Willie started when I told him the name, and I saw his solitary eye scanning Alec all over, as if he expected to see something familiar in him.

- "Any manner o' kin to Cap'n Harry Ireland what was lost on the Spanish Main?"
 - "Son," said Alec.
- "Put it there!" cried the sailor, moistening his leathern fist and holding it out for Alec to grasp. "Put it there! If a young gentleman like you ain't too proud. I sailed under your father, lad."
- "Sailed with my father?" exclaimed Alec excitedly. "Then you can tell me about him."
 - "That I can. I sailed with him to the Barbary

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coast and back, just afore he left London river for the Spanish Main. It was a r'yal voyage we made, and good for him if he'd been content with what was brought home then. But he was always a venturesome man was Cap'n Ireland, and his search for Manoa proved to be his last voyage, poor body."

"Tell me about it," said Alec eagerly, and I could see that his face was flushed with excitement at the prospect of hearing news of his father.

"We went out to the Barbary coast with about ten pedlar's packs o' beads an' gee-gaws, along with some old risted nails an' a few score o' barrel-hoops: an' we came back with a cargo as a Jew would sell his beard for a look at. Such a cargo! Gould dust, an' gould peas, an' gould pebbles, an' ornaments o' gould, an' a great gould kettle big enough to stew a goat in, that Cap'n Ireland gave to the Queen's own Majesty. I tell 'ee there was gould enough to fill this boat o' mine three times over. Why there was a many of us as selled the ragged old clothes off our backs, let alone what was stowed away in the chests; and some even would have traded the weapons of the ship if Cap'n Ireland hadn't stopped them. Elephants' teeth there was, some black with age, an' some still bloody from their moorings; an' riverhorses' teeth, an' other things, as I disremember the outlandish names of. An' when we left, the King o' the Blacks fell a-blubberin' because we had nothing more to sell him.

"A right swift passage we made of it home, too. Fifty-eight days out of the Barbary river—never an

hour more—when our anchor was dropped again in honest Thames mud. An' when the merchants came aboard wi' their clerks, an' the news was spread on shore, the bells was set a-ringing out o' sympathy wi' our good fortune. It was a r'yal voyage for sure!"

"And afterwards?" asked Alec, when the boatswain stopped.

"Afterwards? Why, afterwards we went and spent our money like men. No more work for a spell, so off we set ashore. We lived like emperors, sparin' nothing we wanted; some for a week, some o' the thrifty ones even longer. You should ha' seen us! settin' casks o' good ale abroach for everyone to drink your father's health, young sir; an' deckin' the girls wi' ribbons till they looked like a lot o' laughin' rainbows. Eh, but those were merry days!"

"But my father," said Alec impatiently, "what of him?"

Willie's single eye dwelt for a second on the questioner's face, and then turned away.

"Best draw your net, masters, afore you hear any more o' the yarn," he pronounced. "Tide's ebbing fast, an' you'll have a tough job to get across as it is."

Absorbed by the interest of Willie's story, we had quite forgotten about our fishing; and now the rapidly ebbing tide gave us considerable difficulty in hauling in our net. The catch, however, was a good one; seven very fair fish, and one twenty-

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pounder which I resolved should go as a peace-offering to the Spaniard's housekeeper.

There was a small grate in the cabin of Willie's boat, and we soon had the rich red salmon steaks toasting before it.

The scent of the cooking brought an addition to the party. A gaunt, long-legged, black cat put his nose round the door, and leered at Alec and me with such an evil expression that we involuntarily shrank back; and I at least had uncomfortable recollections of the stories I had heard of witches and of the Evil Eye. A cat may be a mere cat and nothing more; but the other sort are much the same to look at, and I had no particular fancy for being hurried away on a broomstick to attend a witches' Sabbath.

Willie noticed my consternation and broke out into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha! Master Topp; afraid of Nep I see. Come Nep, there's a compliment for you! You've scared the young gentleman with yer pretty smile. No need to fear him, my lads; if there ever was any witchery in him the salt water has washed it all out by now. Nep's been half over the world with me, and you might rub him in the dark for a week without gettin' a spark out of him."

That was all very well, but when Nep set up the brine-stiffened bristles on his tail, and arching his back spat and swore at me through his jagged teeth, all because I moved my twenty-pounder out of his reach, I thought it advisable to rap out a piece of Latin just by the way of precaution. Nep, however,

was nothing more than he seemed, and in later days we became shipmates and firm friends, though it took some time before I became sufficiently accustomed to his eccentricities to be able to pass him without a shudder.

When the steaks were cooked the boatswain produced from one of his lockers a little canvas bag of spices, and from another some rough wooden plates; and whilst we set to with our knives, Nep did the same with his teeth, growling vigorously to show his satisfaction, though I had previously taken the precaution to sign a surreptitious cross over the share that Willie gave him. We made a hearty meal, and Willie, after he had with sailor-like tidiness stowed everything back into its place, tucked himself comfortably into a corner of the cabin, took the cat on his knee, and advised us to follow his example, and to enjoy forty winks to help our digestion.

"But you haven't yet told me about my father," objected Alec.

"Your father, young sir," said Willie, solemnly, "sailed once more for the Spanish Main in searth of the golden city of Manoa; and of him, and of the company o' brave lads as went with him, never a word has been heard to this day."

Alec was silent for a few moments, and neither Willie nor I cared to interrupt his thoughts.

"I don't believe my father is dead," he said at length.

"Mayhap not," answered Willie; "but if he bain't, why, then, he's in the Inquisition's claws, an' that's

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nigh upon the same thing, for you'll never set eyes on him again; though it's sorry I be to have to say such a word to you."

"Jack," said Alec solemnly, taking my hand, "I shall search for my father, and I know that some day I shall meet him again—but how?—I wonder how?

"I'm with you, Alec," I whispered.

Willie had been watching us narrowly, with a smile of half-doubting approval seaming his face. Now he spoke.

"Well, well, lads, if ever you do start to throw away your lives on sich a fool's quest just let Willie Trehalion know, an' mebbe he'll ship wi' you as boatswain. Cap'n Harry Ireland was the best cap'n that ever stepped, an' I'm thinking that this old tar can't do better than take sarvice under his son. But ye'll never find yer father, lad. Manoa has led many besides him to their graves, an' mebbe 'll be the death o' a few more yet before it's found."

Three days had passed since our adventure in Don Miguel's house, and as I had heard no more about the broken crucible, I began to hope that if there had been a storm, it had blown over.

But on the fourth morning, after breakfast, my father told me to follow him into his study, and I guessed that an uncomfortable half hour was in store for me. I was not wrong.

"John," said my father, "what were you doing at Don Miguel's house three nights ago?"

"I went to see Inez," I replied, trembling but defiant.

- "Do you often go?"
- "Yes, father."
- " Why?"

He was looking at me so gravely, and he spoke so quietly, that I knew he was very angry. I thought, however, that the boldest course was the best; so I spoke the plain truth.

- "Because Inez is my sweetheart."
- "Your sweetheart? H'm!" And he stared at me harder than ever.
- "Yes, father," I said, twirling my cap in my fingers nervously, "and—and I want to marry her."
 - "Oh! is that so? How old are you?"
 - "I'm in my nineteenth year."
- "Quite true, quite true. Your statements are generally reliable, John. It is your one good point. But I may remind you that it is also true that you celebrated your eighteenth birthday just a month ago. You'd forgotten that for the moment?"
 - " No, father."
- "No? Well, just for the sake of argument we will say that you are eighteen. Rather young to marry isn't it?"
 - "Yes, father," I answered, "but-"
- "Never mind the 'but,' John. You are too young to marry, so that's one point against you. Now, how do you propose to support a wife? Pardon my asking; it's a very pertinent question."
 - "I thought that perhaps you----"
- "Well, out with it, John. You thought perhaps that I——"

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- "That you would set me up in some business."
- "Good! I was afraid you were going to suggest that I might share my income with you, but I'm glad to find that I misjudged you. Let me see, what sort of business should you prefer? A fisherman's? You shake your head. A poacher's? No? Well I'm afraid I can't think of anything else for which you are suited. It is very sad, but really I don't think you can support a wife at present. Point number two, John!"
 - "But, father-"
- "Wait a minute; I have two more points to urge yet, and then you can have your say. Point number three; the lady is a foreigner. Point number four; I have other views for you. Now let me hear what you have to urge on your side."
 - " I love Inez."
 - "Ah! And----?"
 - " She loves me."
 - " And——?"
 - " Nothing else."
- "Well, John, they are both no doubt very cogent reasons (I shouldn't advise you to trust too much to the second by the way), but I'm afraid they are not sufficient. Now, sir, listen to me. You are an idle, good-for-nothing scamp, and from every side I hear none but bad reports of you. You and your companion in mischief, Alexander Ireland, are a disgrace to the town. Don Miguel tells me that you utterly ruined an experiment of his which had taken him months of constant work, and had cost him a large

sum of money. He had just brought it to a successful conclusion when you caused him to spill his precious liquid on the floor, and he demands that I shall make good the damage. What do you say to that?"

"That you won't do it," I answered; for I knew my father.

"Well, no. I don't consider that he was engaged on lawful work, so I shall refuse to pay. But that is not the point. Your conduct is simply disgraceful, and I have resolved to put a stop to it. I have obtained a sizarship for you at Clare Hall, Cambridge, and you shall start off there in two days."

"But I want to go to sea," I cried.

"I choose that you shall not."

"Am I to be a parson then?"

"Certainly. Have you any objection?"

" I hate the work," I said sullenly.

"Oh! That's unfortunate, but I'm afraid I can't alter my decision. Now go; and remember I forbid you to speak again to Don Miguel's daughter."

"But, father-"

"This discussion is at an end."

Thus it happened that two days after the conversation with my father I was on my way to Cambridge, condemned to fit myself by hard study for the calling of a parson.

My father was inexorable. The life, he said, had proved a congenial one to my ten brothers, and must therefore be the best for me too. I combated the theory vigorously, but without producing any effect on his mind; so I had to submit, and go.

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My father bought me a rough little galloway, and having escorted me to the town boundaries, and seen me fairly started on the road to York, gave me a paternal blessing and a not too heavy purse, and then turned back home.

It was the last time I saw him; for when, years afterwards, I returned to Whitby, he was dead. He was a good father to me, though in those days I used not to think so. But he lived by rule himself, and so he would have had the rest of us do the same; and from that effort on his part arose whatever there was of trouble among us. From what I have seen in the case of other families, I should imagine that we were not in this respect unique.

It was with a heavy heart thumping beneath my jacket that I rode slowly along the Queen's highway. I was separated from my sworn shipmate; I was going to a life that in the prospect I loathed; and I had not been allowed to see my sweetheart, even to say good-bye; sufficient reasons all of them for gloomy thoughts.

My meditations, however, received a somewhat rude interruption. I had let the reins fall on my horse's neck, and he was jogging along quietly with very little guidance from me, when the sound of something moving in the hedge at the side of the road made him swerve violently to the other side and start suddenly forward. I was taken unprepared, and being an unskilful horseman at the best of times, was deposited with more violence than grace on my back in the middle of the road. I

lay there for a few seconds dazed with the shaking, and when I got up and looked about me to see what had caused my uncomfortably rapid dismount, there was Alec standing looking at me, with his face all twisted up in the effort to look concerned, when as a matter of fact he was shaking with laughter at my undignified manœuvre.

- "Hurt, Jack?" he said at length, with exaggerated solemnity.
- "No," I answered shortly. "Was it you who frightened my horse?"
- "I suppose so; but as you're not hurt it does not matter."
- "Doesn't it? It only means that I shall have a pretty chase before I catch him again. That's nothing, is it?"
 - " Willie has caught him," said Alec.
 - "Willie Trehalion here, too!"
- "Yes. Oh Jack, you did look ridiculous! To see your big, lumbering carcase roll over the horse's tail was a sight for little fishes. Don't be angry, but I can't help laughing."
- "Oh, pray go on," I answered loftily, and turned to take my horse from Willie Trehalion, who had come up while we were talking.

When I saw that his face, too, wore a comically deprecating look of amusement, I was just beginning to lose my temper with them both, when the thought of the ludicrous figure I must have presented struck me forcibly. My anger suddenly melted, and I laughed as heartily as either of them.

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"Come, Master Topp," said Willie when we found our breath again, "better to laugh even if the joke's agin yourself, than to wear that glum face you were carryin' before we came an' upset your gravity. You might have been attendin' your own funeral by the look o' you."

"Did you give Inez my message?" I asked, turning to Alec.

"Yes, and very nearly fell foul of the Spaniard in doing it. I just managed to avoid him though."

"What did she say?"

"She cried."

"But the message; didn't she send me a message?" I asked impatiently.

"No," said Alec innocently; "did you expect one?" And then seeing my look of disappointment, he added quickly; "There Jack, I won't tease you longer. She didn't send a message, but she did better; she gave me a letter for you."

Now I don't intend to tell what was in that letter. It was the first one I ever received from my sweetheart, and it kept me happy for the rest of the journey. Need I say more?

They waited patiently till I had finished reading, and then Alec asked me what my plans were.

- "Cambridge, I suppose," I answered ruefully.
- "Parson?" he asked with a mischievous grin.
- "So my father says."
- "Are you quite resigned to your fate?"
- "Resigned!" I cried impetuously. "No; but

now that I'm separated from Inez and you, I don't much care."

- "I am your sworn shipmate, Jack. Don't forget that."
 - "I don't forget it, Alec," I said, taking his hand.
 - "Pardon me, I think you do."
 - " How?"
 - "You say that we shall be separated."
- "Well, so we shall. Cambridge and Whitby are surely far enough apart."
 - " I'm coming with you."
 - "Alec! Do you mean it?" I cried in delight.
- "Never desart a sworn shipmate, Master Topp," put in Willie Trehalion, sententiously.
- "Yes, I'm coming," said Alec; "but I don't mean to turn parson for all that."
 - "Wish I needn't," I grumbled.
 - "Why need you?"
- "Father's commands. What else takes me to Cambridge?"
 - "Why go to Cambridge at all? I don't mean to."
- "What?" I cried, "I thought you said you were coming with me."
 - "So I am; but not to Cambridge."
 - "Where, then?"
 - "London."
- "To London! What for? I don't understand you, Alec."
 - "London is a port."
 - " Well?"
 - "Ports contain ships; ships go to sea; we go to

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sea. It's simple enough. Why Jack, you don't mean to say you are willing to give up our plan of a sea-faring life without a struggle?"

"No," I said; "but I hadn't a thought of running away to sea."

"Why not? You'll never go in any other way, if your father is set on putting you into the Church. Now is the time to take our fortunes into our own hands."

"But Alec---"

"Will you do it?"

I thought for a moment before I answered. A vision of the dull round of books and lectures that was waiting for me at Cambridge rose before my eyes. I had just succeeded in throwing off the bondage of one schoolmaster, and it seemed to me that I was on my way to put myself into the power of seven others, worse than the first.

That thought decided me. "Yes," I said, "I will go with you."

Now during this discussion Willie Trehalion had been darting questioning glances at us out of his solitary eye, and rubbing his fur cap reflectively backwards and forwards on his bald pate with his hook, a habit he had when anything was exercising his mind.

"Masters," he said, shaking his head vigorously, "it won't do. 'Tis ten thousand shames, I allow, that a lad like you, Master Topp, should be made a parson, and never wear iron except to cut his meat with; but don't go agin' your father, lad! No good

ever came o' doing that. You'll be a gould-hunter some day, sure enough, and Master Ireland here a Spaniard killer; but wait till the proper time comes. Makin' a scholar o' yourself'll do you no harm, though they do say, 'Better go to sea on a Friday than sail under a cap'n as has book-learnin'.' Seems, to me, though, that it's the man as is to blame, and not the learning; an' nobody can deny that scraps o' Latin scattered through a bold speech 'll do a lot to hearten men up when they're down. So Willie Trehalion's advice to you is to obey your father's orders just now, an' if you keep up a stout heart, an' wait for your chance to come to you, you'll slip the cassock an' live to rob the Spaniard yet."

This speech of Willie's was a damper on our enthusiasm. We knew that he was thoroughly loyal to both of us, and his advice was on that account worth consideration. We argued the matter out, and in the end it was decided that I should at once set out for Cambridge. I promised to wait a day or two at York, and Alec would meanwhile try to get his guardian's consent to accompany me to Cambridge. If he succeeded, well and good; if not, he would still join me at York, and we would carry out our original plan of going to sea.

Willie demurred to this, but in the end he agreed to the compromise. And when we parted he gave me to wear round my neck a charm which he had brought from the Barbary coast—a certain preventive, he assured me, against witchery of all kinds. When we said "good-bye" we stood in the road,

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joined hands, and sang three times the verse of Willie's sea-song, "Sail away, hack away, plunder!" and thus we parted.

On the third day after this Alec joined me at York, and announced that his uncle—who was his guardian—had given him leave to accompany me. So to Cambridge we went, but in the end it made little difference. Alec made good use of his opportunities for acquiring knowledge, but a prolonged course of rioting and idleness made Clare Hall too hot to hold me. I had not been in Cambridge two months when the inconvenient attentions of the University Proctors made it necessary for me to leave hurriedly. Alec said he would not stay alone, so one night we fled, with the Proctor's men after us. We eluded them by swimming across the river, and without getting into more than an average number of scrapes on the road, made our way to London.

Three days in this city sufficed to exhaust our small stock of money, and there was only one course left open to us. Fortunately it was the one we both most wished to follow.

In a low-roofed tavern parlour in Wapping, we entered into conversation with a gnarled old ship-master, whom we found drinking strong ale with a toast in it, and crunching raw onions as though they were aromatic sweetmeats. To him we confided our wish.

"Want to go to sea, eh?" he growled. "Well, it's a dog's life at first, and not much better after. Rancid salt pork to eat, and not a savoury morsel

like this here onion to be had for love or money. Hard work, hard knocks, and scurvy; that's what you'll get. If you're extra strong, you may stand it; if not, better steal a sheep and get comfortably hanged ashore."

And so he went maundering on; but finally, as he was shorthanded, he agreed to take us as ordinary seamen, promising promotion when we deserved it.

On that very night we were entered on the books of the brig Surrey Hills, and our life of adventure was begun.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT AT VIGO BAY

THE brig Surrey Hills was engaged in the Venetian trade, and did the double voyage twice a year. Her owner was Master Simmonds, of the Cheap; and a good servant she had been to him, having fought her way backwards and forwards between London and Venice against the united forces of wind, waves, and picaroons for nearly five-and-forty years, as the evidence of many a scar on the timbers of her hull and on the faces of her crew could prove.

Our first voyage out was a thoroughly prosperous one. Even the dreaded Bay of Biscay was for once as quiet as the most timorous landsman could have wished. Arrived at Venice, we bartered our homely English goods for a cargo of fine glass and ironwork from the workshops of the Water City, and for curious stuffs and perfumes which its traders had brought from the far lands of Ind, Araby, and Cathay.

During the voyage home, too, our luck stuck to us. We had a fair wind the whole way, and the words, "Trim sails, the watch!" hardly once fell on our ears. Wonderful good fortune this, but it cost our captain the greater part of his crew, who declared

that the ship was bewitched, and I was more than half-inclined to agree with them.

When we were lying at Venice our captain went to a Finn who dealt in charms, and for the sum of nineteen ducats bought from him that which would raise a favouring gale. It was wrapped in a skin case marked all over with cabalistic designs whose meaning none of us understood. What it contained I cannot say, for no man on the brig dared to risk his eyesight by gazing at the wizard's charm after its maker had warned him to keep aloof. But this I know, that while that bag was nailed to the masthead we never wanted for a fair wind to waft us home.

Yet there were signs that the Eye above saw with anger the magical device that eased us of the just labours of sea-working. Almost every night, whilst we were in the more southern latitudes, pale blue lights would fly down to us out of the darkness and perch on yardarm or masthead. They were Corpos Santos—holy bodies—and we knew that they had come to threaten, and not to protect, for when we greeted them with a psalm they held their places as though they did not hear a word of our singing.

We younger ones gazed at the omens with wonder, and little more, but the older seamen were strangely disquieted by them, and as soon as we had dropped anchor in the Thames, and the wages had been paid, more than twenty of them left the ship for good. I would have followed them, for I trusted to their older experience in such things, but Alec, as usual

ridiculed my superstition, and said he meant to stay. So I had to stifle my qualms and stay too.

We were rewarded for our boldness, for the captain not only appointed us to vacant officerships, and housed us in the after-house, but undertook to teach us all the mysteries of navigation and seamanship, so that at the end of the voyage we were either of us competent to take the command of a vessel ourselves. And thus in the event it proved that our captain's deal with the devil was the beginning of our rapid rise in the calling we had chosen.

We stuck to the Surrey Hills for several voyages after this, until at last she suffered so much in a brush with a couple of piratical rascals from Sallee that, though we beat them off after a tough battle, the ship was so much knocked about, that on our return home she was pronounced unfit for another voyage. And so we were out of a berth. Alec would have shipped from the Thames again for foreign parts at once, but I suggested that we should have a run on shore first, so we stayed a few days in London, and finding that our money was melting too fast, we set out on a foot journey round the Southern ports.

It was when we reached Bristol, that the emptiness of our purses compelled us to take ship once more, We got berths on board the Severn there, and had to sail at once, but our vessel had not got clear of the red waves of the Bristol Channel when—opposite Bideford, if my memory does not fail me—an accident befel her which gave us another step up the ladder of fortune. Our captain died of a stroke. Alec,

who had been deep-sea pilot, at once took charge, and I became the second in command. So far, at least, we could not grumble at the way Fate had treated us.

Our cargo was a mixed one for Vigo Bay, and after a good voyage out we landed it there, and took in Spanish wines in return. While the lading was going on, we had plenty of time to spend on shore. Like most sailors we were fond of a ride on horseback, so Alec and I hired horses and rode out of the town.

It was while riding half a league out of the town that we next saw Inez. I did not know her at first, but Alec and I were not the men to let two men and a girl drive past us, the men holding the girl down in the carriage and swearing at her, and the girl crying to us and waving her hand, without making an attempt to help her.

"Something wrong here, Alec," I exclaimed; but Alec had already turned and was riding hard after them. I followed, and after a chase of about a mile we came up with them. We whipped out our pistols and shouted to them to stop or we would fire.

"Now," said Alec, when they had pulled up, "out you get, both of you."

Yielding to the eloquence of the two cocked pistols, they obeyed.

"You with the reins, hold the horse's head. If you move a yard further on I shoot. And you other scoundrel, hand the lady out. Quickly, now!"

They were unarmed, or at least had no firearms, so they had to do as they were bid. As soon as she

was out of the carriage the lady turned and faced the two ruffians defiantly, and they cowered under her glance like whipped curs. Alec made them get in again, and drive off at once, daring them to turn their heads as long as they were in pistol shot.

When they were gone we turned to the lady for an explanation.

"How can I thank you, gentlemen?" she exclaimed.

"Speaks English!" I muttered. "And a pretty girl, too! Wonder what those two scoundrels were up to."

"Madam," said Alec, with a courtly bow, "we are only too glad to have had the good fortune to serve you. Where may we have the pleasure of escorting you?"

"Madam!" she laughed. "You used not to be so ceremonious, Captain Ireland."

Alec stared with astonishment, but I had recognised the voice.

"Inez!" I cried in delight.

"Ah, you haven't forgotten me, though Alec Ireland has," she said; and I saw that she was glad.

"Forgotten you?" I cried. "No, how could I? But I thought you were in Whitby."

"Apparently it has not been worth your while to inquire. I left Whitby more than a year ago."

"I never heard of it"

"Did you ask?"

I was thrown into confusion by her question, and was at a loss for a reply, when Alec spoke for me. "We have been at sea ever since we last saw you," he said.

"Ah, then I forgive you," she replied graciously.

But you must come with me now to my father's house. I don't promise that he will be pleased to see you, but as you are my gallant rescuers he is bound to be polite."

"Don Miguel here, too?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Inez; "you didn't suppose I lived alone."

"No; but I thought perhaps there was someone else," I said slily.

Inez blushed. "Who else?" she asked.

"Your husband?" I ventured.

"I haven't found one yet."

"Then a Whitby lad has a chance?"

"Who knows?"

And again she blushed, and I was just going to say something more when Alec broke in:—

"Where were those two men taking you?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered with a shudder.
"Perhaps to murder me."

"Do you know them?"

"I refused to marry one of them the other day."

"The scoundrel!" I cried savagely. "I wish I'd thrashed him."

"Why, Jack?" she laughed. "He's not the only one who has asked me to be his wife."

"Confound their impudence!" I muttered.

"What?" she cried mischievously. "I seem to have recollections of someone else's impudence too—at Whitby, for instance. But I suppose you have forgotten."

"Inez," I replied solemnly, "you didn't refuse me —at Whitby?"

"Didn't I? Perhaps it is I who have forgotten, then! But come, a truce to this banter. Aren't you going to see me home?"

"Of course we are," said Alec, "and we shall be delighted to renew our acquaintance with Don Miguel, though our last meeting was rather a stormy one, if I remember rightly. How is the alchemy progressing?"

"Oh, he has given that up."

"In favour of what?"

"Fighting. He's a soldier now."

"H'm." I said, without thinking, "that's an honest trade enough."

Inez laughed gaily.

"And the other is not?" she asked. "You're not very polite, Jack."

"Forgive me," said I contritely. "I should not have said that."

She looked at me for a minute with a teasing smile playing round her mouth. Then she held out her hand to me.

"Yes, Jack," she said sweetly, "I do forgive you. You see, I am not quite sure that you were wrong."

And then she began to speak hurriedly of other things.

Our reception by Don Miguel was not a cordial one, but in view of our relations with him in the past, it was perhaps hardly to be expected that he would be overjoyed to see us again. Our rescue of Inez from

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the hands of the ruffians who were carrying her off gave us, however, a claim on his gratitude, and an excuse for calling very frequently to see how she was; and as Inez encouraged our visits, we took every advantage of the opportunity which chance had given us.

Inez and I had many long walks together through the country round Vigo Bay, and on these occasions Alec always insisted on marching some ten or twelve fathoms behind us; for my sweetheart's beauty had won her many admirers, who were naturally not inclined to submit quietly to the success of a heretical Englishman. I had found favour where they had failed, and but for Alec's precaution, a vengeful dagger between my ribs would surely have been the reward of my wooing.

We saw very little of Don Miguel, but I don't think either Alec or I felt inclined to quarrel with him on that score. I pressed my suit with his daughter, and by the time our ship was ready for sea I had won her consent to marry me. I would have done so at once, but the Spanish padres refused to peril their souls by celebrating so unholy a union, and neither bribes nor threats would move them.

I had to set off to sea, therefore, without my bride. But we arranged that I was to come back at once to Vigo Bay, when Inez promised to be ready to sail back to England with me.

We returned to Vigo Bay in less than four months, and with us a large company of other ships, all bearing grain, for which the failure of the Spanish wheat crop promised a profitable market. We neither sold

our cargo, however, nor did I succeed in carrying off my sweatheart. And this is how it happened.

Scarcely had we anchored, when a negro page came off to the ship in a small boat, bringing me a note from Inez.

She was in sore trouble through her love for me, for at the instigation of the priests Don Miguel had forbidden her to have anything more to do with me, and had locked her in her room to make sure that his commands were obeyed. There was even worse news than this in the letter. Orders, she told me, had been received from the Court to seize all the English shipping in the bay, to confiscate the cargoes, and to imprison the crews. As a captive in the town dungeon I should be further from her than ever; but still a free man, I might some day return and carry her off; and so by the love I bore her she entreated me to be gone at once.

Here was a pretty piece of news! We questioned the page, but as he either did know or would know nothing, we sent him off ashore in his boat.

- "What are we to do?" said Alec.
- "I'm going ashore," I replied decidedly.
- "What for?"
- "To rescue Inez."
- "Jack, it's useless! You would be seized long before you reached her."
 - "I must take my chance."
- "It's foolhardy, I tell you. Much better take her advice; escape now and come back again to carry her off."

"Alec, I can't go away and leave her in that scoundrel's power. I must go ashore."

Alec shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if you must, you must. I'll go with you of course, and try to see you safe through it, but I quite expect we shall both be locked up for our pains. We will spread the warning among the other English ships on our way."

We went on deck at once and began to lower the boat. We were lying a good two miles further out than the other ships, so we had a stiff pull before us.

Night was just beginning to fall, and there was some hope that the darkness might cover our movements and enable us to reach Inez, and then slip out of the harbour before the Spaniards had made up their minds to strike. It was a desperate chance.

The boat was already on the bulwarks when Alec shouted, "Hold on all!"

"Too late," he explained. "There's a fleet of boats putting out from the shore now, each one crammed full of soldiers. We must leave the other ships to shift for themselves, I'm afraid, and make a bid for our own freedom. That big fellow there, coming up before the wind, seems to have been told off to look after us."

We were well armed, of course, as the most peaceful ship has to be when there are so many sea-thieves unhanged; and though the Spanish galleon was five times our size, we would have thought nothing of tackling her, five Spaniards to one Englishman being 'y no means crushing odds; but there were three other big ships outside of us, evidently waiting to pick up stragglers; so we were to all appearance hopelessly shut in.

The men looked at one another in consternation. "Put back the powder," Alec cried, "and buckle on your side-arms. Not a shot must be fired, or we shall have the whole nest of wasps buzzing round our ears. Every man of you take a pike or axe, and hide under the bulwarks. We must make that fellow think he has caught us napping."

Our preparations were quickly and quietly made, and long before the big Spaniard was near enough to see what we were doing every man of us was under cover, and the decks looked quite deserted.

But when he sheered alongside and hove his grapnels into our rigging, Alec gave the word, and with a ringing cheer fifty lusty English lads rushed from their hiding-places and were hacking and prodding away among his crew before the unsuspecting Spaniards knew their peril. They were taken completely by surprise, but after the first minute or so they recovered, and fought like wild cats. They were about three to our one; so counting one Englishman to five of them, the odds in our favour were overwhelming.

The Spaniards fought desperately enough until about half of them had been killed; then the rest threw down their arms, called for "quarter," and scrambled down the ladders in utter rout. We clapped the hatches on them; and the big galleon of Spain was ours.

Leaving me with twenty men to take care of our prize (whose sails were all set) Alec tumbled back with the others to our own ship, and set about making sail as quickly as he could.

"An axe here and cut the cable," I heard him call. "No time to weigh. Let go those spritsail brails. Lay out along the bolt-sprit and cast off the gaskets. Flatten in the starboard sheet, and cant her head round. Handsomely now! Topsails next. Work with a will, lads. Time's precious!"

I lost the next words through the distance; and not wishing to slip too far ahead, I bagpiped my mizzen, brailed my main course, and so allowed Alec to creep up to me again.

He made sail with marvellous quickness, and soon was within speaking distance.

" Are your guns all loaded, Jack?"

"Ay, and double shotted, and the lintstocks lighted and lying in the tubs beside them."

"Then make straight for that big chap on your larboard bow, as if you meant to speak him. Fool him, if you can. Say I'm your prize. If he suspects you, give him a broadside for his sharpness. Only keep the wind of him, and you can do what you like. I'll slip across his bows and pepper that side of him. And if that isn't enough, do what your mother-wit suggests; but mind, it must be done quickly whatever it is, or we'll have the other two beating up to help him."

Now, had I acted on my own opinion I should have steered straight for the open sea, dead before

the fair wind. In which case I should inevitably have aroused the suspicions of all three ships, and so have allowed them to concentrate on our course and cut us off. Alec's plan was obviously the best, for when they saw I was steering plump for the southernmost one the others held quietly to their places in the mouth of the bay.

When I got within a cable's length, an officer hailed me. I waited as long as I dared, and then answered; but apparently there was something wrong with my Spanish, for he replied angrily that I was drunk, and an insolent scoundrel for daring so to address him.

At this juncture one of my men, a soft-hearted fellow, who knew enough of the tongue to make out that the Don was using very free language to me, let fly at him with his gun, and sent a three-ounce ball straight into his breast-plate.

That effectually put an end to our diplomacy, so I gave the order to fire as each gun bore. I had warned the gunners to aim high, and at the third shot the Spaniard's main-top mast broke off short like a carrot. His main-yard, too, came down by the run, bringing the sail with it; but as he was still under command I ran up past him, reloading the guns meanwhile, and then hauling my wind once more, gave him a second dose over either quarter.

Meanwhile, Alec and his men had been working like furies, and, tossing their guns about like child's toys, rained such a shower of broken shot into his hull from their lesser elevation, that his lower deck must have been almost untenable.

The Spaniard had been unprepared for our attack, and took some time to beat his men to quarters; but they served their guns well and fast when they did get to them, and the shot soon came flying about our ears like hailstones. His running rigging, however, was pretty well cut to pieces, and as we had half-a-dozen good bow-men stationed ready, who sent a cloth-yard shaft through the ribs of everyone who set a foot on his ratlines, he lay pretty helplessly head to wind, with his remaining sails in the most thorough confusion.

Had we been able to play the game out at long bowls we could either have sunk him, or reduced the number of his crew sufficiently to allow us to carry him by boarding; but the other two Spanish ships were beating up to us, and on her next tack the nearest would be within gunshot.

Alec therefore gave the word to run away west by south, before the wind, through the southern entrance of the bay. The order did not come a minute too soon, though the majority of us were so worked up by the excitement of the fight that we would never have noticed that it was high time for us to quit.

We held on this course for about two hours, and then as the sky had fortunately clouded over, we hauled our wind and stood due south, to give our pursuers a chance of passing us in the darkness. They would never expect us to turn south, so when they missed us at daylight they would naturally look for us to the northward if they continued the chase. That was our theory, what they actually did I cannot say, for we never saw them again.

We held on this strategic course for a time, and on the second morning a brig was seen coming towards us, and as everyone at sea is presumed a rogue until he is proved an honest man, we cleared the decks for action and beat to quarters. As the stranger neared us, one of Alec's men recognised her as the brig *Catchall*, belonging to Captain Fleming, the well-known freebooter. So as he was not likely to let such a vessel as our galleon pass without an overhaul, we quite expected another fight. However, he drew within long hail, and bringing his ship to, signed that he wished to speak us.

"What ship's that?"

"The brig Severn, of Bristol. Alexander Ireland, master. What ship's that?"

"Brig Catchall, Captain Fleming. What's the galleon?"

"The Lope de Vega, of Vigo—a prize to the Severn."

"How the thunder did you get hold of her?"

"Fought for her."

"Then there is war with Spain?"

" I think so."

"You think so! Then followed some talk with his own people which we could not hear. "Will you lie to, and let me bring my boat alongside? I'm honest as the whole bench of bishops to-day."

" Ay, ay."

Alec called to me to come on board the Severn,

and presently a weather-beaten, thick-set man of middle age, was rowed across to us. We went below, and having pledged one another in a jack of ale (as the Severn's hold was still filled with wheat instead of the cargo of Spanish wine we had expected to bring back) Captain Fleming was told of the seizure and fight in Vigo Bay. He listened attentively, nodding his grizzled head at every sentence, but making no remark until he had heard the whole story.

"It was a lucky, plucky escape, captain," he said, looking approvingly at Alec, "and one that does credit to the stuffing of your headpiece. But make no error about it's being an affair of unauthorised individuals. It is the beginning of war, I tell you, and a bloody war it will be. I've seen it coming for this year or more. Ships are being gathered in to all the ports, and great nobles are chartering vessels for other purposes than honest trade or a little free cruising. King Philip of Spain will make a big move before long; mark my words, sir."

"England will be ready for him when he does," replied Alec proudly.

"Ay, lad, I warrant she will, but it's time she was stirring, or the Spaniards—curse the whole nation of them!—will be cruising about the English Channel and up to London town before any of us are many months older. Now, Captain Ireland," he continued, standing up and beating his fist on the table in time with his sentences, "I'm a freebooter and an outlaw, but though there's many an Englishman

would be glad to hear that I was dead, I love my country with the best of them. So when you get back to port, spread the news of this threatened invasion, and say that a warning shall be brought when Philip's Armada sets sail, and that I am the man who will bring it. And may God keep me and mine on sentry-go about the seas till the crack of doom if I fail in this my watch over England's safety!"

And he brought his fist down upon the table with a crack that made our ale-pots dance.

" Pardon me, captain," said I, "we honour you for those words, but I'd like to remind you of one thing. Franky Drake will hang you if he gets his fingers on I have heard him say so." your shoulder.

" Master Topp," he replied, looking at me steadily, "if I can save England by my news, I don't mind if I swing for the bringing of it, and you can say so from me to anyone that asks."

We gave Captain Fleming a ringing cheer as he stepped into the boat. A watch had been stationed to guard the honour of England, and it was a common pirate who went on sentry-go. But pirate though he was, he was a patriot too.

CHAPTER V

JOB TREHALION'S TAME PAGAN

As the bearers of news of the seizure of the English shipping in Vigo Bay, we were persons of some consideration in Bristol.

The good folk of the town were all eager to hear from our lips a true account of the outbreak with Spain, and the result to us was, that except for our beds and a light morning meal of cold beef and ale, we were very little in debt to our host of the Blue Mermaiden, the tavern in which, as it was a place frequented by seafaring men, we had made our headquarters.

The adventure had left us well in pocket, too; for though the Severn's cargo had, of course, not been sold, it had been brought back unspoiled, and our Spanish galleon—a new ship and well stored—turned out a most valuable prize. So our lads promised themselves a good time on shore; and judging by the number of them that we met in the streets with broken heads and blackened eyes, they kept faithfully to that promise.

Trade with Spain was naturally out of the question for the time, and any attempt on my part to return

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and carry off Inez was practically useless. To try it would be to condemn myself to the galleys or a Spanish dungeon for life, so I had reluctantly to resign myself to waiting, in the hope that better times were in store for us.

Alec had some wild notion of fitting out a ship for the purpose of harrying the Spaniards, and breaking up their fleet before it could leave the coasts, but as I pointed out to him, Drake and Hawkins and Sir Richard Grenville and twenty others would play at that game if it were at all feasible, and we had much better wait for a lead from them. So as none of these well-known captains gave any sign of moving, we, too, stayed where we were, and enjoyed ourselves among the hospitable people of Bristol.

One night we learned a piece of news which put a sudden period to our idling. We were returning arm-in-arm from a pleasant supper at the house of Peter Waltham, one of the city aldermen; I chattering in my heedless fashion about the charms of our entertainer's youngest daughter, and Alec, as usual, listening gravely to my nonsense, and putting in a word here and there.

The yellow moon ogled us through the crannied clouds, and by the time we reached the Blue Mermaiden the rain had begun to fall, and the ale-house sign was swinging and croaking discordantly in the now rapidly-rising wind. There was every promise of a wild night, and we were not sorry when we reached the friendly shelter of the inn. It was long

past midnight, an hour at which the house was usually as still as the cable-tier in a calm; but as we entered we heard voices coming from the kitchen, so we peered in to see who the visitors were.

There on the settle lolled the host with his rosy treble chin on his chest, snoring heavily. Beside him was a tall spare man with tangled black hair and an ugly scar running right athwart his brown forehead, which gave him a truculent appearance that his weak, shiftless mouth failed to corroborate. On the edge of the table sat a short, squat, broad man, older than the other; he wore a seaman's skin cap, and a huge brown coat whose wide skirts spread out far behind him on the table.

These last two were talking to one another in a language that I did not understand. I made a move as though to go in, but Alec put his hand on my arm and drew me gently back.

"It's Cornish they're speaking," he whispered, and we sha'n't be able to make out a word of it. Let's go to bed and be thankful there's no watch to keep till the sun's well up to-morrow morning."

So up the ladder we climbed to our chamber, and the voices of the two men followed us dimly through the empty passages.

Suddenly, with utter disregard of the effect that his vocal efforts would have on a sleeping household, one of them began to sing; but our window-shutter made such a din, rattling in the wind, that we could not distinguish much of the song beyond the lilt; which, however, sounded strangely familiar.

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Alec went and made the shutter secure, so that the second verse came to us distinctly:—

Sail away,
Hack away,
Plunder! (rap)
Gather all the valuables you can.
Come back,
Nothing lack,
Thunder! (rap)
Scatter all the money like a man.

The singer repeated this verse time after time, and the other man joined in an occasional chorus, while both, so far as we could judge by the sound, were beating a vigorous accompaniment with their fists on the hard oak table. The song was one common enough among mariners, but there was no mistaking the rasping tones of that saw-like voice.

"It's Willie Trehalion!" cried Alec, and rushed to the door. I followed, and scrambling down our ladder again we made for the kitchen.

"'Art lying, nephew?" we heard the elder man ask as we approached.

"No, uncle; sober truth," replied the one with the scar.

"You always was a vagabond, Job."

"Like you, uncle."

By this time we had reached the door, and saw that the skin cap was now lying on the table, and an iron hook was thoughtfully scratching that same bald shot-shaped head which had excited our admiration in the old Whitby days. "What cheer, Willie Trehalion?" sang out Alec. The man on the table slewed round, dropped to the ground, knuckled his forehead, said, "Bravely, my masters!" and without showing the least surprise at seeing us, asked us how we did.

"Well," I said, "and prosperous, both of us. But surely that can't be Nep?" and I pointed to a gaunt, black cat that had slid from Willie's lap when he jumped off the table, and now stood with its back arched and its tail like a furze bush, spitting and glaring at us with a most evil look.

"Aye, but it is. Been with me ever since, an' remembers you both; I see he does. Go and give the gentlemen your duty, Nep."

The cat, who never disobeyed a command from his master, came and rubbed his shaggy sides against our legs in greeting.

"It's Nep, sure enough," said Alec, "though rather more age-battered and scar-torn than he was. And this is your nephew, Willie?"

"Yes, sirs, Job Trehalion, my nephew, and a graceless rogue."

Job grinned and saluted.

"Where have you been wandering this long time?" I asked, after we had thus formally made the acquaintance of the man with the scar.

"Spanish Main, master, with Captain Andrew Dove. Brought up at Bideford eight days since."

"Made a good voyage of it?"

"So, so. Missed the plate ship we went a'ter, but picked up a tidy caravel, an' half-a-dozen smaller

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fry. Naught much to complain on, save lack of sound liquor; and that did run uncommon short. I tell 'ee we was put to suppin' that thin sour vinegar stuff them Dons fancies. Nep ain't got over it yet."

"Tell the gentles what I told 'ee about Manoa, uncle," put in Job.

"Hold your meddlin' tongue, Job!" said Willie angrily. "They knows about it already; an' didn't Cap'n Ireland's own father lose his life seekin' for it?"

Job grinned and said perseveringly, "Tell about the pagan."

Willie Trehalion waved his hook with a gesture of dissent and said nothing. But my curiosity was aroused. "Come, Willie," I said, "what about the pagan?"

"Take no notice o' what Job says in usual, masters; he's but one peg removed from being a natural."

Job grinned.

"There," cried Willie, "look at him an' judge for yourselves! But about the pagan. We catched an Indian, a brown-coloured varmint, with no more clothes on him than there is on a handspike, an' brought him along with us."

"Well?" said I, seeing by Job's face that there was something more.

"Well, if you must know, on the voyage home he was sullen an' mute as a stockfish, but once here he finds his tongue, an' speakin' in scraps o' English he picked up amongst us, says that if we'll take him

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back he'll lead us to that goulden city I tell you of up at Whitby. Says as he was born there. That's all."

"Tell about the goulden houses, uncle," persisted Job with a cunning leer. "An' tell how the pagan blacked his fingers wi' a burnt faggot an' drawed a pictur' chart on the wall, same as life. An' tell how Cap'n Andrew Dove copied it down on a piece o' sheep parchment, an' swore to walk through them streets afore he was a year older."

"Ye'll never learn gumption, nephew," said Willie irritably. "Cap'n Dove ain't the first as has made that vow an' then broken it. An' if Cap'n Dove ain't old enough to know better than to carry his carcase into a country that's chock-a-block wi' fevers an' savages, an' Spaniards an' famishments, and the devil knows what, why then he deserves all he'll get by his foolishness; an' that's a bellyful o' troubles, an' not enough gould to make a thumbring out on. But Cap'n Dove'll go back on them words when he's sober, I tell you; an' no shame to him for doing it. No man's bound to do sober what he promises drunk."

And Willie jabbed at the table with his hook, as though to work off the irritation which his nephew's persistence had evidently aroused in him.

"Tell'ee he were as sober as I be now," retorted Job, grinning still, in spite of his endeavour to look earnest. "An' he meant goin' too, for he telled us to be back i' three months if we wanted to join the venture. He said it the very day after you'd left,

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uncle, an' bade us give you word of it, if so be as any of us ran athwart you."

"Did you copy the chart, Job?" I asked, for this tale of gold to be had for the seeking excited me strangely.

"Him!" said Willie Trehalion, pointing scornfully with outstretched hook at his nephew. "He couldn't draw a fish-line without makin' ten mistakes, let alone a chart. He's a graceless vagabond, Master Topp."

Job still grinned. "I ain't got a chart, masters, but I got that as can make one."

"How so?" I asked.

"The pagan itself," he replied, rubbing his hands in glee.

"You've got him!"

"It's snorin' in the cow-byre. The folk treated it ill at Bideford—tried to see if it could swallow fire as other blacks can, an' set it eating live rats, an' matched it to fight agin' two tarrier dogs. It didn't like bein' used like that, and so it rinned away an' tracked me like a hound to Lynmouth. It took a fancy to me on the voyage——"

"Fools allus mate," grunted Willie Trehalion.

"——an' thought maybe I'd be kinder to it than the others was; an' so as it promised to sarve me, I let it come along; an' it's the first time as Job Trehalion ever knew what it was to have a sarvint of his own."

"An' desarves to be well trounced for his impudence in darin' to ape his betters," growled Willie.

"Sarvint, indeed! It'll be a gilded coach an' six horses you'll want next!"

There was every prospect of a lengthy wrangle on the subject between the two curiously-assorted relatives; so as I felt considerable curiosity to see this pagan whose dusky hand pointed the way to untold wealth, I told Willie to hold his tongue, and Job to lead us to the cow-byre.

The grey dawn had begun to struggle through the chinks of the kitchen shutters, and at intervals the wind, which had risen now to half a gale, sent a splash of rain driving through the crevices on to the sanded floor of the room.

When the door was opened the morning looked cheerless enough to make even tough old Willie shudder. But, wrapping his huge coat more closely round him, and tucking the long tails under his arms to keep them from blowing about in the wind, he rolled out with his clumsy sea-walk into the muddy yard, and Nep, after a yawn and a stretch and a low "mwrr" of protest at being asked to go out in such villainous weather, left the warm hearth and trotted dutifully at his master's heels.

The cow-byre in which the pagan had been stowed away was a poor enough lodging even for a four-footed thing. Years of wind and weather had torn away the thatch in places, and the boarding of the walls was about as effectual as a sieve for keeping out the cold and wet. Huddled in a corner, into which the rain beat less violently than elsewhere, lay the pagan.

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He was coiled up beneath some loose straw, sleeping; and as he slept he talked wildly and incessantly in his barbarous tongue. One bronze-hued leg projected from the straggling coverlet of straw. Nep saw it before we did, and picking his way daintily among the filth on the ground, went up and sniffed at the limb. Then he quietly turned his claws down into it, and laid back his gaunt body for a comfortable stretch.

As might have been expected, the pagan awoke, but to our surprise he neither pulled back his leg nor made any move to drive the cat away.

Job Trehalion noted my look of amazement at this, and broke out into a loud guffaw.

"Ho, ho! you wonder why he don't move. He don't feel it, bless 'ee, not he! Them pagans hasn't feelings like as we has."

"Shut your silly mouth, nephew," said Willie.

"A pretty way this is to treat your sarvint! Why, the poor brute's too numbed wi' cold to feel the prick o' Nep's claws. Bring him into the kitchen fire an' see if we can't thaw him a bit."

Job, still grinning, took his dusky servant on to his back and carried him into the kitchen. The effect of the heat on the pagan was marvellous. He sat down in front of the fire, chuckling and gurgling with glee, and after rinsing his numbed fingers with the glowing ash as we might with water, and bathing his shivering limbs with the hot embers—though not actually devouring any of the flames, as I had confidently expected to see him do—he was a new man

again. A pot of warm ale, which we roused our sleeping host to brew, completed the cure, and Job's pagan was as blithe and cheerful a pagan as one could wish to see.

When he was thoroughly recovered we spoke to him about the city of Manoa, and by means of broken sentences, copiously helped out by gestures, he expressed his willingness to lead us there. He took a glowing stick from the fire, and drew a chart for us on the lime-washed wall showing the position of the golden city; and quaint pictures he made, too, of the houses and the men, and of the treasures that were to be had there for the taking. And we stared at his uncouth drawings, and listened to his gabbling talk as if moonstruck.

Suddenly Alec sprang up from the stool where he was sitting, and called to me to come up to our room; and though I longed to hear more of the pagan's luring tale, there was a look of excitement on Alec's face that was even more interesting; and so I went.

- "Jack," he cried, when we were alone, "it's time we were moving."
 - "To Manoa," I asked eagerly.
- "Yes. Here we have been sitting idle, while the Sibyl is tearing leaf after leaf from the book of destiny. Even now we may be too late."
 - "Well, let's start as soon as we can. But Alec—" and I stopped and looked at him.
 - "Well, Jack, what is it?"
 - " Inez."
 - "You can't help her by staying. Useless to think

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of going to Vigo Bay again for her till the Spaniards have been utterly crushed, and now is our chance to help at that crushing."

"How, Alec? I thought you meant to go to Manoa."

"Don't you see? At this very moment the Spaniards may be thundering at the gates of Manoa itself, and if once they carry off the golden wealth of that city and get it safely into Philip's hands he will raise armadas that will squash us like so many beetles. Here is our opportunity for serving England, Jack!"

"I see," said I; "and of filling our own pockets, too."

"No, no, Jack. Never hanker after the gold. It's a good bait to catch a crew with, but a sorry goal for an English gentleman to strive after. Might as well give up the sea, settle down and become a merchant at once."

"Not while there's adventure to be had for the seeking—adventure, that is, with plenty of your golden bait at the end of it."

"You've got a good smack of the pirate in you, Jack, I fear."

"Perhaps! And you of the knight-errant. Well, fortunately we can each of us sail with our own particular ideal in front of him, and still keep together and work together. I fight for gold, to win wealth for myself and my sweetheart; you fight for glory, to win your country's thanks. Perhaps, in the event, neither of us may get what he hopes."

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"Perhaps not. Anyway, we can do no more than try. Where can we get a ship?"

"Peter Waltham's brig, the *Bristol Merchant*, is nearly ready for sea. He will be glad enough to let us have her for such a venture."

"Then let's go and see him now. We have had no sleep to-night, but never mind, we can make up for it to-morrow."

And so it happened that Peter Waltham, who had given us our supper the night before, was called upon to furnish a breakfast also. Manoa, whose wealth had lured the father to his grave, was now summoning the son.

Heaven grant that our fortune be better than that of Captain Harry Ireland, who had gone before us!

CHAPTER VI

AN ILL BEGINNING

THE stout ship Bristol Merchant, 118 tons burden. Alexander Ireland. master. has dropped down the Channel in three tides, has taken her departure from Lundy Island, and is now well out of domestic navigation. Astern is a thin black wavy line, rising above the waste of waters-the last we shall see of the iron-bound coast of Devon for many a long day; ahead—now blocked out of sight by the straining sprit-sail beneath the bolt-sprit, now dazzling our eyes with its flashing glory—is the burning yellow sun, just diving over the edge of the world, luring us on, as it were, with visions of a land where everything is bright and golden as himself. What a beacon for a crew of eager gold-hunters!

The worthy Master Peter Waltham, had gladly availed himself of our proposal. Fitting out began less than twelve hours after the pagan had told his tale, and in a fortnight we were ready for sea. Ninety-three men were lying about the decks, drunk as lords, when we first loosed our two top-sails to drop down the river, and three sober ones and five

officers—one hundred and one all told, and a crew of which we were proud.

We made a bad hunt of it to begin with, getting up past the Leeward Islands, and into the great gulf which lies beyond them, before the westward course was given up. Then being convinced that we had overshot our mark and that the river of our search was behind us, Alec gave the word to 'bout ship, and we made our way slowly back again in the face of a teasing succession of easterly winds. The heat at times was awful; and crowded as we were, the atmosphere 'tween decks was anything but restoring to our unfortunately numerous sick men. Scarcely three days passed without some poor scurvyrotted corpse being thrown to the sharks, whose black fins never stirred from our wake.

Matters got worse and worse, till the grumbling of the crew came to a head in open mutiny.

The sultry heat of the day was almost killing. Not a breath of air tarnished the brazen sea; but over the mangrove bushes which fringed the low shore to westward, hung a sullen white steam which shut out the country from our eyes. One would have thought that the weather was too hot for any exertion that could possibly be avoided; but discord, like the devil, can live in any clime, and on this broiling day the sound ones of the crew made their way aft in a body.

A little Irishman, whom Alec had taken in pity from the streets of Bristol, where he was starving, was their spokesman, and his election to that post was not undeserved, as he had by his vapourings stirred up the whole mutiny.

The brown-faced crowd surged against the break of the poop, on which there were only us five officers, and the steersman standing beside his idly swaying tiller.

"Stop, men! Far enough!" cried Alec in authoritative tones. "What is it you want?"

"Many things, Masther Captain," said the Irishman with an insolent laugh; "everything a man can want—health, comfort, and wealth. There's scurvy marks on ivery wan av us, and no wondher, seein' that the only green food that has passed the lips av us since leavin' Bristol River is the sloime off the wather-butts. A dacint pig would turn up his nose at our quarthers. And as for threasure, yez might as well seek it in the great bog av Ballyvore as here. So, savin' yer honour's prisence, all hands forrad means to take a jaunt ashore on the oiland we dhropped yestere'n, an' thin to cruise for fwhat we can git higher up on the Spanish Main. There's no call for throuble or head-breakin'," he added, turning to the rest of us, "though sure it would be a plisant diversion—but whin a score av honest lads has died like sheep wid the rot, it's toime for the rest to spake. An' so my mates here has insthructed me to say that av they doesn't git their way given, why thin they'll jist take ut."

All eyes turned on Alec, who had heard the fellow out with a patience which surprised me. He went a

step or two further aft, leaned on the rail of the little stairway which led to the cabin below, and then answered them, speaking quietly and without allowing a tinge of annoyance to show itself in his voice.

"You make matters far worse than they are," he said. "A few men have died, and that I grieve for; but scurvy always boards a ship on a long voyage like this, and not a man of you but knew that when he pocketed his bounty on Bristol quay. Now hear what I have to say. We must be very near the mouth of the river we seek, and we shall find it. For six days the *Bristol Merchant* will sail southward. If by that time the pagan has not pointed out the river's mouth to you, I shall steer north again, and harry the Spanish towns. Now back with you to your own end of the ship!"

A sullen murmur rose among the crew, and several of the bolder spirits began to climb the poop-ladders, headed by their spokesman. Without moving from the cabin stairs, Alec held up his hand for silence. The fools thought he was going to give way, and halted to listen.

"Hear me!" he cried in ringing tones. "You think to take possession of the ship by mere weight of numbers. Well, you may do it, and if you do, you may hold her for perhaps thirty seconds, not more. Before a hand can reach me I shall be down this ladder and into the powder-room, and one shot from this"—and he drew a wheel-lock pistol from his pocket—"will blow us all into eternity together. Choose for yourselves. You know what my word is

worth, and I swear to you that while Alexander Ireland lives, mutineers shall never command the *Bristol Merchant*. Now, come on if you will!"

The mob of men wavered a moment, and then drew back slowly to the waist.

"Good!" said Alec. "You think better of it? But I am going to make an example of the arch mischief-maker. Send aft that man."

Half by persuasion, half by blows, the Irishman was forced up the poop-ladder.

"Boatswain, heave him overboard!"

" Aye, aye, sir!"

Willie Trehalion's knotted left hand grasped the little Irishman by the neck, and his iron hook slipped into the band of his breeches. A struggling body shot through the air, bumped on the bulwark, and slid with a splash into the warm sea beneath. There was a scurring of black triangular fins, a shriek of agony, a few ruddy bubbles rising to the oily surface, and the greatest enemy to the ship's peace was silenced for ever.

A hush fell on the crew. Each man looked at his neighbour, and then they all stole quietly forward again; and had the calm continued more mischief might have been hatched among their whispering groups. But Alec's keen eye detected a ruffling of the glassy waters to northward, and that was our salvation.

"Trim sail, the watch!" he cried.

There was not a pause. The men sprang to their station, braced round the yards to catch the first of

the coming breeze, and in ten minutes we were bowling merrily along. The mutiny was a thing of the past.

The wind lifted the mists from the shore, and before we had way on the ship an hour, the pagan who was standing in the beak, began to dance and gesticulate in the most extraordinary manner, laughing and pointing with his finger to the land at our bow. Half-a-dozen of us climbed into the round tops, and thence aloft till we perched on the yards, from which eminence we could see a long, steel-like ribbon of water stretching away through the dark forest till it was lost in the haze of the dim distance.

That shining thread was the river of our search. Up its windings lay the kingdom of El Dorado, and Manoa, its capital, the city that was built of gold.

CHAPTER VII

THE RIVER OF HOPE

A T the sight of that band of shining water, a spontaneous cheer arose from every throat on board. Discord and dissension fled discomfited before the advance of the visions of wealth that our hopes saw mirrored in the glassy surface of the river.

We hauled our wind somewhat, and sailed to the mouth. Job Trehalion (grinning till his scar jagged up like a saw), was sent with an eager boat's crew to sound, and before the first star of night had thrown its reflection in the water round us, we were anchored, and the ripples that lapped against our wooden walls had not a grain of salt in them. We had left the trackless ocean to follow where the river should lead us.

Nets of mangrove roots formed an impenetrable thicket on either bank, though it was no easy task to tell where the sluggishly-flowing water ended and the liquid mud of the shore began.

Loathly reptiles—which some of us took to be dragons, till the knowing ones told us they were only crocodiles—lay half in and half out of the evil-smelling brown water, winking their lazy eyes at us,

and taking charge in a slow cumbrous way of every scrap that was flung overboard. Tree toads barked, beasts of prey howled in the distant forest, foul night-birds croaked from the thickets on the shores, and from the evil-smelling stream there arose a putrid yellow mist, thick and rank enough to choke one.

"It's a fever trap we've got into," growled Willie Trehalion, shifting his tangled black wig from the pocket where he had carried it during the heat of the day, to his head, "and if we've no more'n half a score of men down by morning's light we'll be uncommon lucky, say I."

"Don't croak, you unsatisfied old raven," said Alec lightly, but he looked grave none the less.

"The pagan," put in Job, with his usual grin, apologetic in meaning this time, "says this is on'y one o' the mouths, an' we shall open into a great broad river soon, where ye can't see both banks at once. An' there baint any o' these yer mists on it, he says, but limmons on the trees, an' other fruits enough to feast an army, an' all for the pluckin' o' them."

"Go to the forecastle and tell them that, Job," cried Alec, "and serve out a good stiff dram to all hands, and say that they can kill the stench by firing a few grains of powder now and then. Stay, I'll come, with you, and tell them that he who keeps a stout heart may laugh at fevers. They only attack cowards."

He went forward; and Willie Trehalion, the other two officers, and I went down to the cabin for our meal, where we were shortly joined by Alec, who reported that the crew were all as merry as pipers at the prospect of making another step towards our golden goal.

When the meal was over, the devil came and whispered in my ear—at least on no other view can I explain my folly in taking up the dice (Satan's own bones, they say) and proposing a throw apiece to sample our luck, sinister or dexter.

Alec, saying with a laugh, that he did not believe in such omens, nevertheless humoured our folly. He rattled the box first, and flung on the table deuce-ace.

One of the officers threw a pair of deuces!

The other threw a pair of aces!!

Willie Trehalion threw deuce-ace!!!

The heat had worn off and the cabin was full of cold, clammy mist, but the perspiration streamed from my face as though the sun were high above our mastheads. My hand trembled like a palsied dotard's as I took up the fateful leathern box, and for a full minute I rattled the dice without daring to turn them down.

The others waited in breathless silence, and watched intently. At last I took a deep breath, clapped the mouth of the box down on to the table, and then slowly withdrew it.

"Aces again!" cried Willie Trehalion. "The Lord have have mercy on me a sinful mariner!"

Willie's cry was followed by an interval of dead silence; we stood staring at one another as though spellbound.

A shout of laughter from the forecastle broke the

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charm, and in a burst of sudden frenzy Alec threw box and dice together through a porthole into the fog without, and began to chaff us for our superstitious fears.

"Cheer up, Jack," he cried clapping me hard on the shoulder; "the devil hasn't got us yet."

I shuddered and drew back without answering.

"Come, come," said Alec, with some show of anger, "don't let's have any more of this nonsense. I was a fool to take any part in your child's game."

"The Roman admiral threw his omen-giving chickens overboard," said I gloomily, "and two-thirds of his fleet were destroyed."

Alec turned to me sharply, and there was a taunting smile on his face.

"Turned pedant, Jack? I didn't know you were such a scholar. Perhaps you'll favour us with an account of the circumstances,"

"I'm no scholar," I answered angrily, for his taunt annoyed me. "Alec Ireland was the goody boy that did his lessons."

"While his friends amused themselves with tapwenches and pastrycooks' lasses."

"Maybe," said I, with a sneer. "But Jack Topp is gallant enough to prefer a pretty lass to a Greek root any day."

"Both good things in their way. But come, Jack, stand up, put your hands behind you and tell us all about this heathen fellow and his chickens. Don't tremble so, man; there's no schoolmaster behind you with the birch. I'll correct all stupid errors you make."

How long this unseemly wrangle would have continued I do not know—probably till it came to blows. The two other officers had been listening with silent dismay, and honest Willie Trehalion had been looking from one to the other, and pulling the skin cap about over his smooth head till his sconce fairly shone. What it was all about he knew no more than a powder-tub, but he thought it time to break into the quarrel, and maybe he was none too soon.

"Masters, masters," he cried, "ha' done wi' this unseemliness! The quarrel on deck there might be excuse for; the quarrel down here none. Here ye're going at it tongs and hammers, hammer an' tongs, fathom o' one, six fut o' t'other, till there ba'int a bean to choose between you. And this, too, when we ought all to be knit together by reason o' common enemies."

Alec turned away impatiently, but he did not interrupt the boatswain, who went on:—

"Cap'n Ireland, many a good ship's been cast away through her cap'n quarrellin' with his officers. Master Topp, an officer who can't keep a civil tongue for his superiors ofttimes gets hanged. Job, ye graceless loon, what cause to come grinning down here for?"

"Glass run out, uncle; my watch over."

"Cap'n Ireland, then, it's your next watch; an' I hope you'll pardon an old mariner for plain-speaking when it was needed."

Without a word Alec left the cabin and went on deck.

Through the whole of that watch I lay in my

bunk, brooding, brooding, brooding. To quarrel with my sworn shipmate, and about such a trifle, too! Fool that I was! That we had had a serious wrangle, and one whose consequences might easily bode ill for the success of our venture, there was no doubt; but on looking back on what had passed I was almost as much fogged as Willie Trehalion to know what the cause of it all was. Fool, I called myself; and again, fool!

Nep came to me and shoved his cold nose against my cheek, and I rubbed his coarse, scrubby coat and coaxed him to lie down. I was grateful to him, for I felt less wretched with a companion, though he were nothing but a cat. But, then, Nep was not as other cats.

After his watch was out, Alec came below, and by the dim light of the horn lantern which hung to the beams I could see him pacing the other side of the cabin athwartships. He could not see me, and I gave no sign of being awake. Presently he began to smile to himself, and then turning his gait, made straight for my bunk.

- "Jack, old boy, I was the bigger fool of the two."
- "No, Alec, I was by far."
- "No, I. It was my throwing the dice box through the port that started it."
 - "I proposed the dice."
- "Come, come; we won't dispute again. I'll test you with jacks of ale."

We tried; I won; and from that moment the quarrel was never mentioned.

Next morning nine men were down with fevers; several others were undoubtedly sickening for them, and the rest were so scared that they were pretty sure to catch the <u>infection</u> on the first opportunity.

There was no wind to drive the fœtid mists away, and so we had to get out a boat and tow the *Bristol Merchant* up stream by our own exertions. Anything was better than letting the men stand trembling in idleness. But it was not till past mid-day that the stewing air was tempered with a breeze from the sea, which filled our sails, and gave us headway against the sluggish current.

For five days did we tow, pole, and sail through this awful canal. Nine men died, almost all were sick; and but for the promise of the pagan and the dread of Alec's pistol in the magazine, they would have turned the ship's beak to the sea again at any hazard.

On the afternoon of the sixth day we opened out a broad, clear-flowing river, and before nightfall we were anchored in a snug little bay, with a pile of bright-coloured fruits on deck, whose luscious freshness tempted the men to brave certain death from over-eating.

None, however, were any the worse for this change of diet, though the surgeon shook his head and suggested a good blood-letting all round as a preventative of possible evils. The sick men, except one who was too far gone to recover, mended as though under a spell.

During our voyage up the mighty stream we were

able to revel in fresh meat, too; for the forests abounded in game, and the Devon and Somersetshire men, who had poached scores of noble stags on brown, boggy Exmoor, sent their clothyard arrows and crossbow bolts into many a fine waterbuck, as he came from the deep covers to gaze wonderingly with his great eyes on the strange craft that was furrowing the surface of his untilled river.

So fat venison stews smoked in the mess-kids, and tough, brine-fossilled beef became but a distant memory.

The navigation was easy, but slow. Alec was cautious about going too fast for fear of picking up a shoal and getting tightly embedded on it, so he kept the ship under easy canvas, very often brailing up our courses altogether, unless there seemed every prospect of a deep fair-way.

Thirty-four days of this easy progress brought us to the great cataract, which barred our further advance. The pagan had told us of it beforehand, and we heard the thunder of the waters a full day before we rose them. Anxious, however, to satisfy ourselves that the barrier really was impassable, we held on till the current grew too strong to force the ship against it under sail alone, and then we bore away into a vast lagoon on the northern bank, formed by the back-swirl from the fall, and dropped our anchor in the midst of it.

CHAPTER VIII

A SEARCH FOR EL DORADO

NEXT sunrise saw fifty-six of us ashore. We took nothing with us but our arms and accourrements, trusting to the wealth of the forest to provide us with all necessary provender by the way. Of the hundred and one men who had sailed out of Bristol River, twenty-four had died, and the remaining twenty-one, who were all weak from various ills, were left behind to guard the *Bristol Merchant* till our return.

"You will be quite safe," said Alec to them, as they stood about the ship to watch our departure, "if you keep a bright look-out. There's small chance of men disturbing the *Bristol Merchant* in her present berth; and callers won't be so frequent as to be a nuisance. If you do have a visit from any of the pagan tribes, try kindness first, and, if that fails, cannon. How long we may be gone I cannot tell you; but wait for us here three years at the least. You are in a land of plenty. The shores teem with duck and deer; the waters ripple with fish; the trees of the forest are bending with their load of fruit. Take then God's gifts that are offered, hold peace among yourselves, keep your culverins

loaded, and no ill can befall you or your ship, save old age and the ordinary maladies of life."

The men on the ship raised a cheer; we answered them from the shore; and so we parted.

There was no path through these virgin forests, for the wild beasts that held them never retrod their own footsteps, and man had not as yet penetrated their lovely solitudes. To force a passage was a work of time and infinite hard labour. It was hew and hack, hack and hew, wherever the big trees flourished, for the lians which everywhere abounded, had woven themselves into one solid maze of interlacing network. It was like breaking through a never-ending wall of the strongest wicker-work, and I rather think that after the first twenty miles of this sort of tunnelling, many of our band of fifty-six envied the lazy lot of the twenty-one who were left behind to guard the Bristol Merchant.

On the second day out a piece of misfortune befell us, which left us without the guide on whom we had relied to lead us to the golden city. Our pagan allowed himself to be bitten by a venomous serpent, and so died.

The pagan's death was like breaking our compass at sea. Without this brown fellow as guide we could only drift, wandering hither, wandering thither; up mountains whose tops were capped with a hood of glistening snow, through ravines where the surging waters hardly left us standing room; now making bridges of felled trunks, now twisting ropes of tough lians; now killing a deer for dinner, and now taking

a great delight in rolling over a spotted jaguar who had marked one of us for his own meal.

It was weary work, though, and there were times when we almost gave up the quest in despair; for often after a long day of painful hacking and hewing we had to go all the way back again, to get round a swampy morass or a precipitous ravine. heartening aimlessness of our toil went very near to quenching the fires of the golden beacon which each man's hopes held up before his eyes.

Occasionally we would come across a village of Caribs or other savages; and though they generally showed fight at first, as soon as they learned that we were enemies to the Spaniards they at once became as friendly as possible.

Job Trehalion was our interpreter; for having a fancy for giving orders to his servant in his own language, he had picked up a great deal of the pagan speech on the voyage out, and so now by a mixture of scrappy sentences and dumb show he was able to parley with the savages. As none of the rest of us knew a word of their talk, Job was immensely proud of his accomplishment, and by dint of practising it on every possible occasion he eventually became quite a good interpreter; or at least, if he misinterpreted, we were not competent to point out his error.

Weary, weary days they were, and utterly profitless seemed our search through those trackless forests. Every tribe of Indians we met made signs that they knew Manoa, and willingly pointed out the direction in which they thought it lay, but a

search always brought us to another village, whose inhabitants would in their turn declare that the golden city lay in a wholly different direction.

And so we were sent to the vale beyond the mountain chain; from it to the great river which lies half-a-moon's journey towards the setting sun; from that to the fire mountain whose snowy tippet never melts; and from that again towards the Great Northern Sea. Weary, weary days!

But running through all this concert of discouragement, there was one recurring harmony which heartened us and kept us constant to our search. All the pagans with whom we spoke of the golden city gave the same tale in the main, though they garnished it with an infinitude of conflicting embellishments. One would say that the king was white like us, another that he was bronze-coloured like themselves: this one might tell how he ate flesh, and that one would swear that his food was wholly vegetable; but all agreed that the city lay by a great lake, or on an island in the midst of it, and that the worship of the people somehow centred on the lake. And greatest spur of all to us hungry gold-hunters—all earnestly affirmed that the treasures were beyond the power of man to count.

And why should we disbelieve the tale? Cortez and his conquistadores found just such another city and just such another worship in Mexico, as also did Pizarro and his crew of bandits in Peru. No European had ever trod those paths before them, and when their ships touched the shore of the New

World they had no better evidence than an Indian tale to show them what empires lay beyond. Were we to be more unbelieving or more far-seeing than they, and to declare that the great Inca the pagans told us about was a myth, a will-o'-the-wisp, or, worse still, a sorcerer who could vanish at his pleasure?

We canvassed the question often over our evening camp fire. Willie Trehalion said we were fools, and that we should well deserve a Spanish halter when at last we felt it chafing our necks; but the rest of us believed still, and so held sturdily on.

Thus we travelled and travailled for a year and seven months and a week and two days, till we came to a small valley, barren as a Norfolk sandbank, and cut up by a brawling rivulet, which sprawled from side to side across it. The valley was bounded on either side by tall frowning cliffs, which it would have puzzled a rat to climb, and it lay on the western flank of a range of mountains running north and south, which we were trying to cross to what rumour said was the certain site of Manoa, on the opposite side.

For a day and a half we tramped up this stony desert, and then came to a wall of rock at the head, so steep that the stream which leaped over it was torn by the air-fiends to fragments in its fall, and dropped into the pool at the bottom as a rainbow-stricken shower of shimmering mist.

We looked round in dismay. Willie Trehalion took off his skin skull-cap, laid it on a rock, sat down beside it, and screwing his mouth up into a knot, began to whistle dolefully. Job, as usual, grinned.

Alec went forward to reconnoitre, hoping to find some practicable spot, but in vain. "Back again," was the word, and with tightened belts, too, for our provisions were all consumed, and there was no chance of getting any more till we came again to the wooded country we had passed through two days before.

Such a march, fasting, was enough to make the cheeriest of us shudder, but no one grumbled—there was nothing to be gained by it. So with an empty feeling about the waistband, and the comforting knowledge that that feeling would soon become a gnawing pain, back we trudged, until we came to the pass where a narrow ledge of rock jutting out from the steep cliff, and overhanging the water, had formed our path on the way up. None but a sailor or a goat could have passed along it, and as single file was imperative, our procession was straggling.

We were toilfully feeling our way along this dangerous mousewalk, when a shout of dismay in front told us that some accident had happened to the leaders. The jutting elbow of rock prevented us from seeing what was wrong, but the word was quietly passed down the line that a large body of Spaniards held the open ground in which the track ended, and had captured Alec (who was leading), with a noosed cord before he could draw iron in his own defence.

Willie Trehalion and I were bringing up the rear. The rest struggled back to us and asked what was to be done.

"They call on us to surrender," said the lad who had been close on Alec's heels.

"Knowing that there's no food here, an' knowing we can't come to honest blows," added Willie " The Trehalion, polishing his head thoughtfully. Dons have us on the hip, Master Topp."

"What do you advise, Willie?" said I.

"Don't know," he answered. "I'd liefer die, though, than yield to the Spanish divils."

"Quick then!" I cried. "Follow me those who dare, and let the rest guard the path."

It was a desperate chance that I tried, but it was just possible that some of us might be able to flounder through the rocks and falls and rapids, and so come out on the Spaniards further down the river. If we could only take them unawares from behind, we might get the better of them yet. And so with forty of the stout fellows after me, I slipped into the tearing current.

Sometimes we swam, sometimes we waded, sometimes we were borne along like so many helpless logs of wood down cataracts and through eddies; and of those that escaped drowning, all were bruised and battered till their flesh was like a jelly, or their bones broke like water-rotted twigs. And of the survivors (though it is wormwood even now to speak it), as the current carried their half-drowned bodies ashore, not one escaped instant or subsequent capture.

CHAPTER IX

DIGGING FOR GOLD

THE Spanish gold mine was a hell set in the midst of a paradise, a loathsome canker on the fairest piece of earth's bosom. The air was loaded with sweet perfumes and foul with Castilian oaths; it murmured with the songs of beautiful birds and shivered with the crackings of slave-drivers' whips. The humming music of the waterfall was marred by the discord of clanking fetters. Nature had done her best; man, as if in jealousy, had done his worst. It was the Garden of Eden, but in the midst of it yawned a loathsome chasm girdled with unsightly debris, and alive with swarms of filthy, ragged slaves.

For eight horrid months Alec and I and twenty of our men worked in the chain-gangs at these mines; and of the torments we endured no words of mine are strong enough to give conception.

To the human fiends who were our taskmasters no pleasure was like that of making an Englishman suffer pain, and no spectacle so humorous as to see him undergo indignity. They drove us like cattle to the work; they made us toil when the fierce heat of the day would almost choke the lungs; they fed

us on putrid meat and sour maize burgoo, when sweet goat's flesh and delicious fruit clusters were to be had as cheaply; they gaoled us at night in a squalid, filth-floored hovel, and chained us up like wild beasts; so that in the end they took from us even the power to restore our jaded energies with sleep.

Once during a moonless night we broke the fetters and tried to escape. Once on a rainy day we rose on the guards and made for the woods. Both efforts were in vain, and those who did not get cut down or shot out of their misery were flogged till the bleeding flesh hung in shreds from their backs. And of our fellow-slaves the mild-eyed Indian peasants marvelled in stupid wonder at our foolish daring, and the fierce-eyed Spanish thieves and murderers gloated over our recapture and punishment.

We were summoned one morning, not to work, but to toe a line before the treasury. Great skin-covered packs of metal, as much as a man could stagger under, were brought out and strapped on our shoulders. Then we were all linked to a chain and driven off down a narrow trail. Where it led we did not know, and no one would tell us; but long though the way was, we marked every inch of it with sweat from our brows, with blood from our blistered feet, and with muttered curses against our merciless captors. Could we but have snatched arms and liberty for a few moments there would have been a bitter reckoning among these tyrants.

They knew it, too, and taunted us with our help-

lessness; but the light of hatred in our eyes must have scared them a little, else why did they half starve us, if not to keep down the growth of superabundant muscle? High-mettled horses are not fed too well when they are set to do farm work.

After a weary march of twenty days, during which one poor Minehead lad died through sheer exhaustion, we arrived within view of the blessed sea once more, and the sight of it sent new energy pulsing through the veins of every man of us. This our Spanish masters observed, and grimly bade us moderate our joy, for the Holy Inquisition had need of us, hereticos maldettos that we were.

"A galley's rowbank," said they, "is a berth that most men find to be mighty unpleasant, but it is a very feather-bed, senores, to the couch which the good priests will spread for heretical Englishmen."

And then they laughed at their own wit, and playfully flicked us with the slave whips.

But the freedom of the sea breeze ad entered into our brains, and we were sanguine, though Heaven knows there was but little cause for hope. The man next behind me in the chain gang, whose shoulders were smarting from one of those humorous lash-cuts, whispered, "We'll get to wind'ard of these devils yet, Master Topp, and then——"

I nodded my head, and, absurd though it seemed, I had a feeling that he was right and that we should have our turn soon.

Dipping into a deep ravine, where the tree-tops arched above our heads, we camped for the night

beneath their cooling shade, and perhaps because some spark of pity touched them, perhaps only because they were tired of torturing us, the Spaniards did not prevent us from trying to cool our hot, bleeding feet with the juice of such leaves as were within our reach. With but little sleep we wore through the night, and next day passed the fortifications and entered the town.

Treasure trains were evidently not an every-day occurrence, for the whole town turned out to look at us; and when they saw we were English, a movement went through the crowd, and the hootings and revilings made the echoes ring again. Of noble-spirited pity for a fallen foe there was no trace. All faces were cruelly exultant. Even the women laughed with mocking glee at our wretchedness, and bade our drivers "lash their cattle into a trot for the last stage."

And at this there came into my eyes that which all the lashings could not bring; for in my folly I had fancied that a woman's heart must needs be soft.

The gold was unstrapped from our weary shoulders and stored in the treasury, and then those of us who were English—all except two, that was—were marched to a building whose grim and forbidding front needed no sign-post to tell us what went on within its stern white walls. We passed through an iron-studded gate—whose dismal clanking as it closed behind us sounded like a warning voice telling that life and hope were now barred out

from us for ever—and so across a courtyard into which opened a great bare room with high, closely-barred windows, where for a little time we were left to our own reflections; and these were none of the pleasantest.

Before nightfall a guard of soldiers came and unlinked us from our chains. Alec and I, as the leaders of our party, were separated from the rest of the brave fellows. A small supply of water in dirty earthen jars and a handful of coarse, broken crusts were given to each of us. Then we were led down a flight of well-worn stone steps; a door was opened; we were sent headlong forward into the darkness; the door swung to behind us, was bolted with a click and a double snap, and the footsteps of our gaolers echoed along the passages and died away to silence.

At first the dungeon seemed to us black as a slave-driver's conscience, but gradually we noticed that a faint light was coming in through a heavily-grated window in the wall. Bruised and shaken with our fall, we lay on the pavement and wondered what would be the next evil to come to us.

"Ho, ho!" laughed a weird unearthly voice from the murkiest corner of the cell. "So they've given you water in pitchers, and then caused you to spill the water and break the pitchers in the hurry of your entry! Ho, ho! They're funny dogs these noble Spaniards."

I started to my feet, and stared hard into the corner; but the darkness was too thick for me to see what manner of thing it was that had addressed us.

"Ho, ho!" cackled the voice again; "more flesh to frizzle and crackle in the flames, though there isn't over much fat on it; more skin to be torn by the pincers; more stout limbs to wear the iron boot. Ah, ha! More sweet work for the kind and gentle Inquisition."

"Who are you," cried Alec sternly, "man or ghoul, to take such delight in horrors?"

"Oh, ho! It's the name you'd like, masters! They know that, and I'll not tell you. I publish no autobiography till I'm racked for it. 'Tisn't safe. Walls have ears, and recanting in the instrument room—where they've got sawdust on the floor, remember—is wearisome to the flesh. But," he added, with evil glee, "you'll know that better by-and-by."

A shudder of loathing ran through me at his words, and I trembled as a man does when the demon of Fear takes hold of him. I do not usually show it when I am afraid. But this man was a very high priest of horror.

"Well, friend," said Alec, after a moment's silence, "at least you will come to the light and let's have a look at you. There's no danger in that."

"Oh, ho! Been gazing at the daylight, have you? Eyes not attuned to the darkness, eh? Ah, ha! The Holy Inquisition will teach you to see like barn owls before you've drunk down all the gentle medicine for sick souls that it will offer you. Are you tough, my masters?"

A bony claw seized me by the leg, and I could

feel the hard fingers pressing into my flesh like iron talons.

"Good! Good!" he cried, as he felt the toil-hardened muscles. "Here are good stout thews and sinews to be tamed!" And he rubbed his hands and jangled his fetters. "They'll not set the little pot-bellied knave to man the handspike when they lay you on the rack. You'll have the greater honour; it will be the tall, lusty one with the cross eyes. I used to know his stroke well. Ah, me! I'm getting an old, worn man now, and the pot-bellied racker serves my turn. Serves—my—turn! Oh! ho!"

The cell rang loud with his ghastly merriment.

"The poor fellow's mad," whispered Alec to me. "Tortured out of his reason, perhaps. Still, he's an Englishman, and may be able to give me news of my father." And he added aloud, "My good man, did you ever meet or hear of Captain Ireland, who sailed out of the Port of London for Manoa, and was taken by the Spaniards on these coasts?"

"Oh! ho!" burst out the unearthly cackling again. "Captain Ireland, is it? Ay, the gentle merciful hands of the Holy Inquisition were laid upon his stubborn shoulders, and his proud back was bowed; and because he would not bend his knees to the blessed saints willingly—cross yourselves, masters, we may be spied upon—they put the iron boot on him and crushed the bones to jelly. Ay, a haughty man was Captain Harry Ireland, but the great mother Church brought him low enough,

down even to the ground—cross, you lubbers, there's a priest at the window!—where he repented of his sins, and swore to be a good Catholic to the end."

And the man began mumbling Latin prayers, and not another word could we get from him, though Alec questioned him hard. An Ave or a Paternoster was the only answer he would give to our inquiries, and these he hurled in our teeth like so many cross-bow bolts.

At length we had to give up the attempt to learn anything from our mad cell-fellow. So, weary with the toil of our long march, we addressed ourselves to sleep, and the Latin mutterings from the corner of our dungeon were the lullaby that invited us to slumber.

Next morning the door was opened, and as the sunlight from the white-paved courtyard without streamed into our cell, it fell upon a naked mass of human flesh huddled up in the corner. The man was awake, and he blinked his bleared, red eyes as if the glare pained them, and then putting up a hand, shrunken and sinewy like the talon of a bird of prey, he pulled some locks of yellowish-white hair over his face to shield it from the brightness of day. And all the time a froth of Latin litanies trickled from his lips in an unctuous stream.

More I did not notice then, for a party of soldiers laid hands on us, and led us out through the court-yard and into a long, low room, draped all in black.

We were in the judgment chamber of the Holy Inquisition of Spain.

CHAPTER X

THE INQUISITION

OF what cruel scenes could the walls of this black-hung chamber speak, were some cunning hand to work the tale of horror on its sable tapestries! Each tragedy to have its picture—Heavens! the space would not be ample enough for the task, work the needle never so closely. As I gazed at these inky hangings, I thought of all the stories I had heard of Spanish priestcraft and murder, and the memory all but stole my courage from me.

We were stationed beside two others, one a young Spanish woman, and the other an Englishman whom neither of us knew. Both of them had gyves on wrist and ankle. At the end of the room were three priests, and before them was a table on which lay an ivory crucifix. The Englishman and the woman were made to step forward a pace. They were both very pale, and their limbs shook as though even to stand were too great an effort for them.

Then the middle priest of the three, a tall, lean, stern-looking man, addressed them.

"My erring children," said he, "has the gentle discipline, which our Holy Church imposed upon you

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for your good, softened your stubborn hearts, and brought you back to the true fold?"

"Gentle discipline!" repeated the Englishman, meeting with a smile of quiet scorn the keen glance of his questioner. "Look at these marks!" And he pulled back the cloth which covered his arms, and showed a score of purple wounds.

Then with a sudden change of feature he did the same by the woman, and showed that she, too, was branded with their stripes. "And look at those!" he cried wildly, "and may the image of this tortured, angry flesh rise before you at the Judgment Day!"

"The spirit must be guided through the flesh," pronounced the priest calmly. "A shattered body for this world is but a trivial matter compared with a whitened soul, chastened by penance, for the next."

"You canting hound!" broke out the other. "You butcher of women—yes, flush if your shrunken heart can spare the blood to do it with! Priest, see! I who have never kneeled to man before, kneel to you. If there is a spark of your sex left in you, act the man to-day, and let this poor gentle lass go her way in peace."

The priest made no answer; but there was a cold flash in his eyes that boded ill for the suppliant.

"She is guiltless," went on the Englishman, with fevered haste. "If she has renounced your creed it was that she might take mine, her husband's; and it was at my bidding that she did so. If that be a crime let me answer for it. Upon my body let your fiends work their worst. It is strong enough and tough enough to glut even their bloody thirst. But spare her tender flesh. God knows it's torn enough already. Priest, I pray to you; spare her further torture. For the memory of your mother, for the love of your sister, spare her!"

His voice rose to a shriek as he spoke these last words; and he turned and clasped the poor girl in his fettered arms.

"Your blasphemies further not her cause," said the tall priest coldly. "The woman has a soul to be saved, and if the Church's discipline prove inefficient she shall stand beside you in the *auto-da-ft*. It is enough. Lead these two away."

At this point I was very near doing a foolish thing, and had I followed my first thought this history would never have been written. For when the Englishman, maddened by their icy cruelty, sprang at his judges, my blood rose in sympathy with him and I would have followed, forgetting that the soldiers behind us could have cut me down at the movement of a finger. I hesitated a second, and that it was that saved me, for the Englishman was felled to the ground even in the act of his leap, and I saw that it was vain to help him. Therefore, I held quiet, and remained so till he and his weeping wife were hustled out of the room.

Then the tall priest turned to us.

"Are you heretics?" he asked.

"No, senor," said Alec. "We belong to the Reformed Church."

The priest frowned.

- "Will you kiss this crucifix and become children of the Church, and faithfully adopt all her doctrines?" said he.
 - "No, senor; we will not."
- "Reflect, my erring children," said the priest sadly. "Unless you repent you are damned."
- "A matter of opinion, senor," said Alec with a polite bow. "And as two churchmen of the different faiths could not agree on it, and as neither I nor my sworn shipmate are churchmen, we will not argue with you who are one."
 - "This is no place for trifling!"
 - "Senor, I am not trifling."
- "Nor for contradicting your superiors. Soldiers, take them away, and if by to-morrow morning they shall not have stepped from the paths of error, endeavour to purge them from its clogging clays by the discipline."

And so, without another word, we were marched back to our cell.

- "Well, Alec," said I, when the iron door had clanged once more behind us; "the toils are closing round fast. It seems to me we're in uncommonly dangerous quarters, you and I."
- "Oh, ho!" chuckled the old man from his dark corner. "You're a fine lad to-day, a very Hercules with those iron thews of yours; but you'll be a groaning cripple to-morrow."
- "A truce to your prophecies, you black-omened dotard," I cried, impatiently.

"Gently, Jack," said Alec. "Remember, the poor chap's mad."

"Not he," said I. "But, Alec, will you change your faith at their bidding?"

"Will you?"

I could not answer Alec at once. I saw no reason for stubbornness if we might honourably yield.

Alec looked me fully in the face. "I know little about their faith," he said. "It's enough for me that it's a Spanish faith, and therefore unfit for honest Englishmen. I shall not change my creed, Jack."

"Then no more will I."

"Right! We will defy them together," cried Alec eagerly.

"Ay, we'll defy them; but they'll make us dance for it, and to the music of our own yells. They'll carve up our living flesh in their devilish contrivances, and if we hold out they'll make a bonfire of us, as the lank priest threatened to do to that plucky Englishman and his young Spanish wife."

There was a moment's silence. I pictured myself in the Englishman's place, with Inez standing by my side, the Spanish girl who would some day take my creed as his wife had taken his. And in this hour of my danger the knowledge that my sweetheart was far from me was a great joy, though little had I ever thought that it would prove so.

Alec guessed what I was thinking. we've no women with us, Jack," he said simply.

"Thank Heaven for that!" said I; for it might have been.

And for a while I lay on the straw of the dungeon and gave the rein to my despair.

Meanwhile, Alec paced up and down the narrow cell as though he were on his own quarter-deck, and I could see by his tight closed lips and the deep line on his brow that his thoughts were no pleasanter than mine. Presently he came to a halt before me.

"Jack, I'm going to escape the torture."

"How? Unless Drake or Greville or Dove or some other of the English captains were to turn up in the nick of time to sack this town and set us free, I see no hope of safety. And that chance isn't worth thinking of."

"No, it isn't likely that the Fates would be so kind to us as that. But see here. When the soldiers come to-morrow they will find me limp and dejected. Terror will have so unnerved my limbs that I shall have to be carried to the torture-chamber. But once there, I slip from their hands with a blow here and a buffet there, seize the first iron bar or oak stool I can lay hands on, and fight like a cornered wild cat till some pluckier dog than the rest rushes in and finishes me."

" And the wrist-gyves?"

"I shall grasp my weapon double-handed. It will fall the heavier."

"Heel to heel, Alec," I whispered, and squeezed his hand.

The old man had been watching all this attentively from his corner. Now he broke out with his horrid laugh.

"Ah, ha, ha! Cabals and whisperings, plans and plottings! So you think your puny wiles will lift you out of the hands of the Holy Inquisition, when once they have closed on your heretical carcases. Oh, ho, ho! 'Tis a juicy jest indeed. That potbellied little racker would laugh till his sides cracked if he could hear it. Ods winches and branding-iron, but I must tell him when next he does his duty on me."

"You choose strange subjects to jest upon, sirrah," said I, angrily.

"Oh, ho! You'd laugh too if you saw the humour of it as I do. You may some day, if you are tough enough to live through the next halfdozen years or so."

And then he lifted up his cracked voice in a horrid song:---

> Rack-winch and branding-iron, Thumbscrew and pincers. Steel hose and boot of iron, 'T makes a man grin, sirs. Jag-saw and leaded whip Wielded by jesters. Each full of merry quip, Faith's potent testers. Oh richly humorous are the tormentors Stationed by Catholics over Dissenters!

"A pretty song, is it not? There's only one verse yet, for the poetry's been somewhat knocked out of my brain of late. But I'll sing it over again, if it pleases you."

"In the fiend's name, no!"

"Oh, ho, ho! Does the iron shoe begin to find

corns all over the tender feet already? Eh, we'll then; we'll talk of other things. Women, Jack? You've a comely face, Jack, though your beard would be none the worse for a few chips from your mother's shears, and that great stalwart body of yours is just the one for a lass to nestle against. Got a sweetheart in every port at home, Jack, and one or two over besides, I dare lay a twisted cord to a thumbnail probe. Eh, lad?"

He leered evilly at me, and waited for an answer, which I was in no mood to give.

"Come, Jack," he went on, seeing that I kept silence, "don't be sulky. A sailor-man finds women to worship him wherever he goes—ay, even in this devil's playhouse. Oh, ho! my pretty man, you'll be cuddling a strange lass to-morrow or the next Many's the highborn lover she's had already: and, what's more, though they all remember her, there'll be no jealous rapiers rasping against your ribs for her sake. She's called the Scavenger's Daughter, Jack. She's had her arms round me. lad, and a rare lover's embrace it was, too-hot and stifling, and for tightness I never knew its equal. You may writhe under it at first. Oh, ho! I can see you now, wriggling like a crushed snake! But when she opens her arms to let you get your second wind, you will admit that the caress was worth enduring for the sake of the blessed calm which succeeded it."

"Peace!" I cried, threateningly, "or I shall be tempted to forget your grey hairs."

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"Oh, ho! I crave your pardon for my merriment, good Jack, but this shyness of yours is so humoursome. But there, we'll leave the wenches and talk of drinking. Now, I warrant you've a rare droughty throat, Jack, eh? A neap tide in the ale cask when you've had your fill, eh? Come, confess; you're a thirsty soul, Jack. I can see it in the glint of your eye."

I saw it was useless to attempt to stop the old dotard's eloquence; so, glad at least that he had got on to a less gruesome subject, I admitted I could take my liquor as well as most men.

"So? I thought as much, Jack. Well, you'll soon have such a bellyful that your skin'll be nearer bursting than ever it was in the taverns of England. It'll be a weaker brew than you're used to, maybe, but they won't stint you in quantity. Ho, ho! before it's done you'll be glad it isn't stronger. You stare, good Jack—Oh, ho, ho!—and think it's only a pretty jest of mine. Ho, ho, ho! Splendid! splendid! How truly beautiful is innocence!"

And then the crazy babbler went off into such convulsions of laughter at his own wit that I thought he would do himself an injury.

"Ah, Jack," he went on at length, grinning at me till I had to turn away my eyes from his—so evil was his glance, "the liquor will be a new one to you, and the manner of drinking newer still. No toasts; no stave-lilting; no dancing, my lad. No, no; it's all done with the most fitting solemnity—ah, ha, ha! They will lash you securely, standing, to a stout post,

and press your head back-so. Your mouth-Oh, ho, ho! it makes me laugh now to think how your poor jaws will ache with the yawn !-- your mouth will be propped agape with a splinter of wood; and some fathom above it will be a hogshead of water—ah, Pure, sweet water, Jack! Ready? Then out comes the plug, and the drink begins. What? You glutton, would you have it come in a generous stream? The fun would soon be over at that rate. No, no! Drop by drop it comes, never quickening, never slowing; drop by drop. With a minute glass it would be easy to reckon the pace, and then, knowing the capacity of your hold, we could figure out the time you'd take to fill. It's a very long process, Jackey darling, and you'll see the cross-eyed knave who always undertakes this branch of the business, depart to his dinner in the full knowledge that when he returns, picking his teeth, you'll be supping away merrily at your draught. How d'ye like the picture, Jack?"

"Horrible!" said I, "if it's true. But I doubt you, old man. They couldn't be such fiends."

"Oh, oh! Couldn't they? What about that lass you saw in the Black Room?"

"True. They had shown no mercy there."

"No, my boy. And they won't be kinder to you, an Englishman; that's sure enough. Well, to continue the fairy tale. The cross-eyed racker will sit down beside you and watch you choking and snorting and swallowing; and he'll polish up the cunning tools of his trade, humming a tune in the cheery

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manner of a man who feels he is doing his duty—and enjoying it. But he is a humane man, Jack, this cross-eyed knave, and a great lover of his gentle sport. So when he sees your face pass through three shades of blue and begin to go black as his own conscience, and your eyes are goggling like lobsters', and there's a ruddy foam on your lips—why, then he'll knock the ash from his cigarillo and lay you down to drain awhile, and to recover your wind for the next trick. The humour of it, Jack! Can't you see it? Oh, ho! Come, join me in a chorus; the words of it are at least as true as anything else that's spoken here:—

"Oh, richly humorous are the tormentors
Stationed by Catholics over Dissenters!

"Good-night, Jack. My old jaws are quite weary with my chatter, pleasant though the theme is to both of us. Ah, ha, ha, ha!"

Then he was silent once more, and I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ROW-BENCH

SCARCELY, so it seemed, had I closed my eyes when there was a clanking at the door as its bolts and bars were withdrawn, and a dozen armed soldiers trooped into the room. It was still dark, but one of them carried a lantern, and by its light I saw that they were all splashed with fresh mud, and had evidently been travelling recently and rapidly.

"Get up, you English dogs," said one of them, roughly. "Smartly now! You're wanted."

"What for, senor?" said I, wearily.

"What for? How does that concern you? You do as you're told, without asking the reason. Come, up you get, you lazy rogues!" And he began to use his heavy boot freely.

"You're to march out of Caraccas at once," said one of the other Spaniards; "and may keep your heretical skins whole for a day or two longer, if you have luck."

"From Caraccas?" said Alec. "Is that where we are?"

"Certainly, senor," replied the other with a mocking bow, "and I hope you like our town."

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"Oh, ho!" chuckled the Old Man.

The Spaniard turned to him. "You are to come, too, old crookbones. Are you too lame to walk to La Guayra?"

"Oh, ho, ho! But are we going to La Guayra, most wily senor?"

"Certainly. Do you think a Spanish caballero would trouble to lie to a hound like you?"

"Why, if it's to La Guayra I'll make a shift to hobble so far. But I'd rather ride o' mule-back."

"Ride!" said the soldier with a rude laugh. "I warrant you could hobble twice the distance, so that it lay away from the offices of the Holy Inquisition."

"Ah, ha! you've a pretty wit, senor—a pretty wit! But it's the sweet salt air I wish to sniff. The sea breeze is meat and drink to old mariners such as I."

He scrambled to his maimed, distorted legs. One of them was shorter than the other; and that other knotted and gnarled like some old willow tree.

"But you'll let me bid farewell to my pot-bellied little racker, senores? He'll be half beside himself with grief at losing such an old boon companion as I."

"Had I my own way, sirrah," said the soldier, contemptuously, "I'd break your wry old neck for a useless encumbrance; sense and strength are both gone from you. But my orders are to set you to an oar along with these two lustier knaves, so come along." And he kicked him into the courtyard and bade us follow.

"The galleys!" said Alec, with a shrug. "Respited for the present!" and did as he was bidden.

I followed, and presently we were linked to a great chain-gang with a lot of other prisoners, among whom were several of the *Bristol Merchant's* crew, who greeted us kindly. Job Trehalion was in front of me, scar and grin complete as of yore.

"Brave news, Master Topp," he whispered.

"What is it?" said I.

"Haven't you heard? There's tidings of an English ship that's been harrying the coasts, and an Indian spy has brought word that her beak's turned t'orst here. There were an armada lyin' i' the roads a week agone, but it's sailed west, an' there's only a carrack an' a brace o' galleys now. And as one o' them last bain't got a man aboard her we're to work her sweeps. Brave news, bain't it, Master Topp? Once at sea, who knows what we may do?"

He rubbed his hands and grinned till I feared for the integrity of his features.

"Attempt nothing rashly," said I, for I had not over much faith in Job's judgment, and feared he might start an outbreak which would end in death to us all. "Attempt nothing whatever till Captain Ireland gives the word. He has a headpiece worth ten of yours and mine, Job."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Job warmly; "that he has. And when he gives the sign he'll have the lot of us at his back, no fear."

Then the cavalcade was put into motion and further conversation became impossible.

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We passed through the still streets, by churches and houses and gloomy convents and great public buildings, and so on to the batteries and fortifications, where there was strict parley with the sentinels before we were let out. The Old Man, who had been dragging himself painfully along behind me, sank down on the muddy road to snatch a moment's rest, and through some pity for his condition I bade him climb on to my back. Without further ado, up he scrambled, chuckling and crying out to the soldiers that he'd got a mule to ride, 'or at any rate an ass, after all. This I thought was somewhat ungracious.

The double gates were opened, and out we trooped on to a narrow, well-kept road that the frowning culverins could have swept with iron hail for a score of perches. We passed through other gates and other drawbridges thrown across natural clefts, and saw other heavily-gunned batteries beside them, making the position one of such enormous strength that twenty good men could have held it against an army.

During the two hours' tramp the sun sprang up from behind the eastern hills, and by the time we entered La Guayra it was broad daylight.

The Old Man, whom I had set down from my shoulders, cried loudly for a breakfast. He wasn't going to row on an empty belly. Oh, ho, ho! Not he, indeed! They might thumb-screw his hands to the oar, but he wouldn't put an ounce of weight on it; no, not even if they twisted a knotted cord

round his temples and hove him backwards and forwards with that!

Little notice, however, was taken of his vapourings, save to bestow a curse or a blow when his importunities grew too noisy. We were hustled roughly into boats and ferried across to the galley which lay straining at her anchor in the road.

"She's pierced for thirty sweeps a side," said Alec, who had been counting the row-tholes. "A hundred and fifty or a hundred and eighty rowers that means unless we are to be singularly undermanned."

"There be three more boat-loads coming off," observed Job Trehalion.

"Two for us and one for the smaller galley ahead there," said I. "And look, there are a host more of slaves and soldiers on the shore ready to embark. But where's the carrack, I wonder?"

"Hull-down to norrard, master," said one of the other Englishmen.

"Way enough!" sang out the officer in charge of the boat. "In oars, and mind you slaves don't topple overboard. I don't want to lose you till you've done some work."

"Aye," cried the Old Man, "Spanish lubbers that you are, let the English seamen go first and show you the way!"—and got a scabbard blow across the face to quiet him.

She was a galley of the first class; and from her keen steel beak to her gilded coach she was, for a galley, as fine a craft as ever ran to windward against a nor'-easter. But from our coign of disadvantage we did not look upon her with much appreciation. She had been lying idle for a full twelvemonth, and yet had scarcely had time to sweeten. I never sat on anything harder or rougher than her rowbenches.

Each of us English was stationed at the end of an oar—a post of honour, if there can be such a distinction for slaves who are chained to their work—and the five other tennants were manned by rapscallion landsmen of whom there seemed to be a very liberal supply.

A soldier commandant and five soldier officers, mighty fine armour-clad gentlemen all, took possession of the coach and cabin on the spar deck. A handful of dirty, lubberly sailors and a company of soldiers were stationed forward; and when a few handsful of maize burgoo had been distributed amongst us slaves, the drivers on the gangway cracked their whips, and we swung out our oars and got under way.

The galley had been pretty lively as she plunged at her anchor, and the Spanish cut-purses and cut-throats beside us were beginning to feel uncomfortable; but when she got some way on and the motion became easier they thought their qualms would pass away, and so they broke out into a monotonous chant, which marked time for the swing.

But their song did not last long. By rapid degrees the "cheep-cheep" of the tholes drowned it, as the long, rolling swell of the Caribbean Sea rocked us up and down, and the swarthy faces of the rogues became sallow as old ivory.

And then began a scene of misery that sickens me even now to think of.

The poor wretches, in the agony of their sickness, would fain have dropped the oar-tennants. The drivers lashed them, lashed us, lashed all within reach. The helm was put up to run along the coast, and the beam roll made the sufferers still more sick. They could not do a doit's-worth of work, and in their loathing bade the drivers fling them overboard.

We English could not each do the task of six, and cursed the drivers for our unearned stripes. The officers in the stern swore haphazard at all they could clap eyes on. And above all the hellish tumult and discord rose the weird unearthly "Oh, ho's!" and "Ah, ha's!" of the Old Man.

Then came a lull of exhaustion, and the Old Man thought it a fitting time to air some more of his poetry. This was the chant his harsh voice grated out:—

Score up the heretics;
Lay on your scourges;
Beat time while galley's bends
Lift to the surges.

Torture like fiends of hell; Keep thongs in motion; Make every sea-dog here Drink up his potion; Drink up his cup of wrath Down to the dreg-lees. Poison the air with oaths; Poison the sea breeze.

Store up an enmity Never forgiven; Then hie you to the priest; Get yourselves shriven.

Soon now the tide will turn; Turned be the lashes. Soon shall your bodies earn Vengeance for gashes.

"Crack!" came the driver's whip across the singer's bare shoulders.

"Best keep your wind to yourself, old prophet," growled a stout fellow who sat near him; "seein' that we're chained up here like dogs, and can't stir a fist to right ourselves with."

"I tell you, good fellow," replied the Old Man earnestly, "before another day is spent you shall drive a steel axe through these Spanish head-pieces."

"I'd do it blithely, Old Man," said the other; "aye or through six, or through sixty if it came to that. But there, you're babbling. They've driven your old brain crazy, poor master, with their hellish torturings."

"Babblings?" cried the Old Man fiercely, "I tell you, Jan Pengony, that as surely as your back is a mass of sores to-day, so surely shall you pay back a sword-thrust for every whip-cut they have given you."

"In the fiend's name how did you learn mine? I never set eyes on you afore. Is it magic, master?"

"Ah, ha! Magic! Oh, ho! Aye, magic's the word, Jan. I've lived long amongst these very good friends the Spaniards, and the devil, who is their patron saint, has taught me many things. You needn't cross yourself, Jan; they say he doesn't like it."

"The Lord be between me and harm!" exclaimed the man devoutly.

I could hear the scared sailor mumbling a strange mixture of hard words and scraps of prayer to keep off the evil spirit, and I more than half shared his alarm. But though I had no wish to be beholden to anyone who worked magic, still I could not help the feeling of elation which the uncanny old prophet's words roused in me. By virtue of his powers the Old Man appeared to guess the thoughts which were simmering in my mind, for presently he sang out, "Well, Jack, my brawny giant, are you ready for a cut at your oppressors?"

"Peace, Old Man," said I, "if the soldiers hear you, they'll smell mutiny, and fire mumchance into the lot of us."

"Oh, ho! No fear, Jack. A Spanish hidalgo doesn't know our heathen tongue."

"Maybe not," said I, "but there's no harm in being prudent. And another thing, Old Man, I warn you not to practise your devilish arts on me, for I know Latin, and if you're a warlock you'll be finding yourself in uncomfortable quarters."

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"Oh, ho! It's well for you, Jack, that the Spaniard is too fine a gentleman to cumber himself with barbarous English. Had my worthy friends on the poop heard your insolence—setting yourself up as an exorcist—you wouldn't have escaped with a beating. Verily, it was great presumption on your part. Know, Jack, that none but a shaven papist priest, with three crafty torturers trailing on to his cassock, can quiet the devil of which I am possessed now, if that excellent devil wishes to speak. But at present he is dumb, Jack, so get on with your toil; for though we are heading for the place of deliverance, there are many weary leagues left to row before we reach it."

Then with his teeth close set, and a constant stream of mutterings and subdued laughter forcing their way between them, he swung to his oar with an energy that his wasted muscles seemed to me incapable of supplying.

The Old Man's words filled me with hope, and the powers that inspired them with fear: so, unwilling to be further beholden to his art, I kept my tongue quiet, and looked out to seaward.

Keeping even pace with us was a large carrack of about 500 tons, pierced for a great quantity of ordnance, and crammed to the bulwarks with soldiers. Hanging on her windward quarter was another galley, rowing four oars fewer than ourselves, and she, too, carried a heavy fighting crew. With a sinking heart I recognised that the three of us would be too strong for the Englishman; for

though I knew that one of his lads was a match for eight or maybe ten of these glittering Spaniards any day, still against odds of fifty to one his chance was hopeless. He might beat us off, or perhaps even sink us; but capture us, never.

And so the Old Man's words seemed to me to be but foolishness after all. And with that thought I once more tore at my oar in sullen gloom.

Towards nightfall we had a rest. The galley's sails were hoisted to catch the rising breeze, and so, drawing the oars a trifle inboard, we slipped the handles under the gangway, leaving the shining blades acock in the air on either side of her. All round us was sickness and misery. The sun sank behind a reef of purple cloud, and the freshening wind began to hiss and shriek more keenly through the oar-blades.

The sea got up, the rain poured against us in cutting sheets, and squall after squall tore from the inky blackness above. The galley was allowed to run under foresail alone, and a course was shaped for El Pueblo del Norte, on the north side of Margherita. But the lubberly soldier Spaniards had not known enough to keep a good reckoning while daylight lasted, and so, holding too much to the northward, did not make out the island till we had almost passed it. And then, as she would not turn to windward under sail, and as the sea was too heavy for the sweeps, they let the galley drift where she would, and took themselves to their prayers, hoping by the help of the saints to find

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themselves under the lee of one of the Windward Islands by daybreak.

But while our masters busied themselves in calling out to the saints, and with their own hands did nothing for the safety of their vessel, we in the waist were merrily occupied.

A driver in his passage along the gangway swerved to a roll which threatened to jerk him from his feet, and grasped at a certain carroty head for support. There was a clank of chains, and the man drew his hand away (as though the head had burned him. Too late! for Alec had gripped his leg and pulled him down. The driver yelled. The shrieks of the storm drowned his first cry, and a blow from a clenched fist silenced the second. The shackle-key was ripped from his belt and passed down the outside line of slaves.

Darkness hid every movement, and the voice of the storm hushed all other lesser sounds. In half an hour we English were every man of us unfettered, and ready for a bid for freedom.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

HARDLY was the last of us free from the oar shackles, when with a shout which rose high above the din of the winds and waves, we rushed from below and crowded, a naked mob, on to the poop. There was a brief turmoil of blows and blasphemy, weapons were snatched by the weaponless, some of the Spanish officers went overboard, and the rest were gaoled in the coach. Now for the common soldiers!

In a body we rushed forward into the thick of them, and one or two were knocked into another world before our lads could stop their rush.

"Surrender," shouted Alec loud above the tumult. Not a man of us heeded or stayed his stroke. A dozen more Spaniards fell like pole-axed bullocks.

"Surrender, and you shall have quarter," cried the captain again.

The Spaniards, such of them as had had time to seize arms, dropped their weapons at the word and scurried below out of harm's way. Our men let them run—nay, even hurried them with the flat of a sword blade when they were too slow.

And thus in the space of a few minutes we had

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made ourselves masters of the galley, and had not lost a man in the doing of it.

- "Get her baled clear, Jack," cried Alec, "and then come aft to me."
- "Ay, ay, captain. And the Spanish galley-slaves? Shall I send them adrift from their moorings?"
- "Will they join their countrymen, think you? Remember, there are scarcely two dozen of us all told."
- "Not they. They've suffered too much to want their heels in the bilboes again."
- "Well, knock the irons off them, and set them to bale. We must have shipped a fearful weight of water to make us float so deep. See they don't get hold of any arms, though," he added, anxiously.
 - "Where's the Old Man?"
- "On guard over the forescuttle. He's like a fury; gnashing his teeth with rage against the prisoners, and cursing them with a pretty assortment of the finest Castilian oaths. He wants to heave the whole lot overboard."
- "Ay, captain," bawled Pengony, who was standing near, "an' he says them Spaniards is like Jonases, an' we'll be cast away afore day dawn if we keeps 'em nigh us."
 - "Does he say that?" I exclaimed in dismay.
- "What if he does?" said Alec, carelessly. "Never heed what the Old Man says. They distorted his mind, Jan, when they crippled his body."
- "The Old Man prophesied true once," growled Jan in his deep ocean-voice—"telled that we should

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be at liberty, which we are; and after a scuffle with them hounds, which we had."

"And," said Alec with a laugh, "I might have prophesied as much, and yet you would not call me a wizard."

"Ay, captain, but he telled me my name, me, Jan Pengony, as he'd never seen afore. These bain't idle words he's speakin' now. And Master Topp there thinks as I do, captain, I warrant."

"Why, yes," said I. "I think it would be safest to strike the cargo overboard."

"It would be sheer murder," said Alec, warmly.

I laughed. "Would it?" said I. "Then I'll do it, and never expect my conscience to trouble me for it after. They are only Spaniards, after all."

"Only Spaniards!" cried Alec fiercely. "They're men. And to kill men in cold blood is murder, I tell you. Mark me, Jack Topp; I've killed half a score of the breed in fair fight, and God willing shall serve my country by killing several score more before old King Death gets to windward of me. But this—never! So to your duty Master Topp, and I to mine."

Jan Pengony looked after him as he walked away along the gangway, and then turning his weather-beaten face to mine growled out:—

"Captain's heart's an honour to him, Master Topp, but it'll work him ill yet. His father's was so afore him; spared the Spaniards when he could ha' crushed 'em, so I've heard tell, an' they forgot it, an' crushed him instead when their turn came. Mark

me, Master Topp, the fewer Spaniards there be cumbering the seas, the safer be they for English mariners."

And I believed he was right, but said nothing, and went to see to the baling of the galley.

We got her dry after much hard labour, and leaving the balers at their work—for every now and then a big sea would come inboard—I went aft to the poop. Alec was at the tiller himself.

- "Whereabouts are we, Alec?" I asked.
- "I'm not sure," he replied anxiously. "None of those dolts in the coach know in the slightest. They are all soldier officers, and far too fine hidalgos to trouble themselves about a ship's reckoning. The pilot busied himself with that, and he's with the sharks now."
- "Ah, well," said I, "it's blowing too hard to last. We shall get a glimpse of the stars soon."
- "Yes, I expect to be able to get our latitude soon, but we'll have to guess the longitude. The lubbers have let the glass run down."
 - "How are we by the Windward Islands?"
- "Can't say. There's no chart on board of anything east of Margherita, but I know that the reefs in these narrow seas are as thick as pickpockets in the London streets. So get you forward, Jack, with your best eye well skinned, and if we seem likely to pick any of them up, let me hear a good Northcountry hail. There's a lead-line in the bittacle there. Take it forward with you, and put a hand in the chains to try for a sounding occasionally."

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I went forward. "Here, Pengony and Trehalion," I cried, "take the deep-sea lead to the chains. Don't let it go too deep while we're scudding at this rate."

"Ay, ay," cried the men, and I went forward myself to the forecastle head.

The galley was plunging desperately, ripping up the seas with her keen beak, dipping her stem into the green bulk, and sending great masses of foaming water curling over the forecastle deck. All our bulwarks had fortunately been torn away, else we must have foundered with the sheer weight of water they held -and I found it no easy work to keep my post. Standing was impossible, so I sat down on the streaming planks, holding on to the breeching of a gun, and straining my eyes into the howling darkness ahead whenever the interval between two waves left my poll uncovered. Now I could feel that we were rushing up a liquid hill, now tearing down into a raging valley; now the galley, bad sea-boat that she was, would rip through a crest and settle down sluggishly, now she would shake herself clear and race forward afresh-but not a fathom in front could I see. We sped out of inky night astern into more inky night ahead. The darkness of Acheron was on us. I must trust to my ears alone.

But it was a very Babel of sounds that filled the spume-sown air; the groaning of timbers like to part with their straining, the fury of the wind amongst the rigging, the roar of the seas as they ground against one another like liquid millstones, the terror shrieks of the Spaniards, the duty bawls

of the seamen, made up a din indescribable. I might just as well have been aft for all the good I could do; but while Alec stuck to his post at the tiller I would stick to mine in the bows.

Heavens, what a turmoil there was! The spirits of the storm were out and busy, taking vengeance on us for disregarding the Old Man's words when he bade us surrender the Spaniards to their grasp; and in their heavy anger they tossed our crazy bark about among the waves like a chip of wood in a sluice run. I feared much that Alec's chivalrous generosity would cost the lives of more than one of those under him.

"But avast mooding! What is that? Breakers? A reef?" A sea broke over me, and its crash drowned all more distant sounds. cleared away. "Yes! The shore is close aboard us!"

I had just opened my mouth to hail when down plunged the galley's head again, and souse I went under, in full cry.

The next minute, when that wave set me free, I yelled as I had never yelled before. Down went the helm as far as Alec dare press it, and over heeled the galley's lee gunwale till the wave-heads came pouring in amongst the terrified slaves.

"Breakers still ahead! My God, they are all round us!"

All hands could hear them now. We saw their white curling crests beckoning to us, and in a moment we were rolling amongst them.

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There is one clear spot on the lee bow.

"Hard-a-larboard! Keep her away, Alec, for your life!"

Now we are through the channel and heading to the next line of surf. The water is smoother. Can we round-to for an anchor? No, she would only drift on to the rocks broadside on. At them, then, straight, and, please God, we may be carried over somehow!

Crash! she struck upon the reef—and then crash! and again—crash!

Every timber shivered, and the foremast came down within an inch of my arm.

The terrified soldiers below burst up the forehatch and streamed on to the deck. The waist was full of foaming water and struggling men. The heavy seas were making a clean breach over the poop.

Crash! Crash!! Crash!!!

We ground and bumped upon the cruel rocks, and, for aught we could see in the gloom, the reef might be a flood-wash rock in the midst of a desert ocean.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT BEFELL THE CARRACK

A COLD grey dawn at length lighted up the wreck, and as the chilly rays ruddied and grew warmer, the violence of the gale began to moderate, and the crested seas lost their cruel whiteness. The stern half of the galley had been torn away by the heavy surf, and crumpled up like a sea-urchin's shell; and with it most of the heavily-armoured Spanish officers had disappeared. Perhaps a score, too, of the slaves had been washed away and drowned, and with them three or four of the soldiers who had rushed into the waist when we struck.

Of the English, however, not a man was missing. Used to trucking with the ocean, they had scrambled to what instinct said was a coign of safety; and now clustered, a brawny, well-armed group, on the forecastle head.

A short cable off from where we were wedged the land rose high and dry—a small island, so far as we could make out in the as yet uncertain light.

"The water's shallow," said Job Trehalion with his broadest grin. "Shall we go ashore, cap'n?"

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"We can wade most of the way," said I, "and for the rest, those who can't swim can raft themselves on planks; there are plenty of them floating about."

"What about sharks?" observed Alec.

"Oh, ho!" chuckled the Old Man. "Never fear the sharks. They've enjoyed a good bellyful of fat Spaniards; they won't be hungry for lean Englishmen. See, I'll give a lead!" And into the water he flopped, and paddled with his arms to the shore.

The rest of us followed, some swimming, some on fragments of wreckage, and in a short time all got safely to land.

It was a small island, about two miles in girth, that we had been cast on, and the myriad sea-fowl circling round our heads showed us there was little danger of starvation; but as there was no pond or stream in sight, half of us scattered in search of fresh water, whilst the rest busied themselves on the shore or in the surf, laying hold of any bits of wreckage that might drift within reach.

Spanish bandit and Spanish soldier worked cheerfully beside the English sailor, and no one could have told that a dozen hours ago they were flying at one another's throats. But though we had by no means ceased to regard the Spaniards as prisoners, the pressing need of the moment thrust party rancours into the shade. We were all shipwrecked, and for the time everything else was of minor moment.

The blazing sun quickly dried whatever we were able to rescue from the water, so we were soon in

a position to light a fire with which to cook the seafowl which some of us had caught. Before nightfall we had a goodly array of these hanging on spits before two huge fires, and scores of fresh eggs roasting in the embers.

"Better food this than you've been accustomed to of late," cried the Old Man, as he threw down a carcase from which he had been tearing the tough, fishy fibre with his teeth. "But the sea-fowl will soon become scary if we stay here long, and then we shall have to take to barbecued Spaniard. Oh, ho! A juicy morsel indeed!"

I turned from the old ghoul with a gesture of horror. He noticed it, and I thought he winced.

"Ah, ha! Jack, how do you like the prospect?" he inquired banteringly. "I'd give another toe nail, if the torment chamber had left me one, to see those great jaws of yours mumbling over a rib of fat Spanish mutton."

"Peace, cannibal!" said I. "The sea-fowl will last us for many a long day yet, and when they're gone we can live on shell-fish."

"Nay, but the Old Man's right, Master Topp," growled Jan Pengony's deep voice. "Gulls soon gets scary, and fish is bad to depend on, let alone bein' thin sort o' food to fight on at the best o' times."

"Then," said Alec decidedly, "the sooner we get away from here the better. There are six other islands clustered near us. One is a mere wavewashed rock, four are, I think, about the size of this, and one which lies some league and a half to the south-east appears to be of considerable size."

"Ay, captain, if we had a boat to reach it," put in Pengony.

"We have what's as good—the material for a raft," replied Alec. "Now I think that the first thing to be done is for a small party of us to raft it across to that larger island, and see what prospect it offers. If bad we are no worse off than before, and can come back and make a larger raft on which we may attempt the voyage to the Spanish Main itself. And once there, and in the neighbourhood of Spanish towns, we shall be able to improve our fortunes by a sufficiently generous use of our English muscle."

"We'll help ourselves and spoil the thievin' Dons, no fear, captain," observed one of the men. "But if that's to be our venture, what call to go over to the large island at all?"

"Because I hope we may find a ship there, or even a town. I have heard that the Spaniards have pearl fisheries hereabouts, which ought to prove an easy quarry for us, while the other plan may mean a long tiresome hunt, lasting for months."

"Axin' your pardon, captain," said another, "but wouldn't it be best to build the big raft straight away? If there's Spaniards on that there island, why, then, the more of us as there is to tackle 'em the better; and if there bain't, why, we can just go straight on."

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"No," said Alec, "a raft large enough to carry all of us would be heavy to handle, and far too conspicuous. I propose to build a light vessel, just big enough for four, without being cumbersome. In this we could go across quickly by night and land unobserved, while a larger raft, sluggish in its movements, would certainly be seen if the island is inhabited; and an arquebusier or a couple of archers could pick us off one by one before we got a chance of landing."

"Oh, ho!" put in the Old Man at this point, "the youngster's got some sense in him after all! Do as your captain tells you, you dolts, and if he lands you all in heaven you can say it's the Old Man's fault."

The men said no more, for they yielded to the old dotard's counsel when another, and he a man of unimpaired brain, might not have succeeded in persuading them. Even I felt more comfortable now that the plan had been approved by this uncanny authority.

The discussion was closed, for no one had anything more to say. We set a watch to guard against possible attempts on the part of our prisoners, and addressed ourselves to slumber.

During the next day a small raft was made, and when night fell four of us embarked on it. Alec and myself with Jan Pengony and another—the two last being enormously powerful men—formed the crew; and after we had cautiously paddled out through the reef we set a rag of sail and steered a

course by the stars. The sea was smooth, the wind was dead aft, and slipping through the water at about a knot and a half an hour we made the island a little before midnight. The surf broke at the foot of tall, forbidding cliffs, and as there appeared no place for landing we lowered the sail, and taking to our paddles worked round to the southward.

In about a mile we came upon a scrap of shelving beach, upon which, after much trouble, we drew the raft up, and then set out to explore.

It was mighty hard work scaling the cliff, and all our nimbleness was needed to keep clear of falls. But we reached the top at last, and at once found ourselves in a tangled lian-bound forest, through which it was furiously hard work to press a passage. It did not, however, extend very far, and presently we came out into the open again. The sea-fowl were not quite so numerous as on Galley Island, but there were gay-plumaged parrots and other land birds in abundance. There were traces, too, of four-footed beasts, and presently we flushed from a piece of swamp a fine drove of pigs, which made our mouths water and our heels itch to give chase. This, however, Alec forbade, saying that hunting cries might be dangerous if there were Spaniards in the neighbourhood. He bade us walk prudently, therefore, rove our eyes and kennel our tongues.

"Why all this caution?" said I with a laugh.
"There's never five-toed foot trodden these thickets since deluge-time."

"Very possibly, Jack; but have you no sense

besides those keen eyes of yours? Turn your nose up wind, man."

- " Well?"
- " Now sniff."
- "There's nothing but a smell of heated marsh and rotting leaves, with a sprinkling of pungent flowerodours every now and again."
- "Yes? And what bush do you think these same flowers grow on, Jack?"
- "How should I know? I never learned their outlandish names. Fire tree perhaps. It smells something like smoke."
 - "Something like smoke?" replied Alec, drily.
 - "Why, it is smoke!"
- "Ay, smoke sure enough. I saw a thin blue wreath of it floating up above the clump of bushes ahead there not a minute since. Look, there goes another!"
- "Phew," said I; "Philistines, for an Emperor's ransom!"
- "Exactly," said Alec; "and therefore it seems to me we had better advance carefully and reconnoitre their position. They may be only one or two, or they may be hundreds. So forward to the bushes; keep the cover of the long grass as much as possible, and be ready to duck down your sconces smartly if anyone puts in an appearance. There's no use in bringing the whole rookery round our ears by carelessness."
 - "Ay, ay, captain," said Jan Pengony with a grin, 1st me an' Garge here for that. We haven't

forgotten how a Dartmouth deer's poached yet; an' we got the wind o' this 'un, so it's as easy as makin' a riled Spaniard swear."

We went on again through the rank vegetables, startling more pigs, and keeping a bright look-out for chance snakes, but not a trace of Spaniards did we see; and in a very short space we were peering through the further end of the copse. Neither house nor fire was in sight; but the thin trunk of smoke rising in front of us could mean nothing but that there was a fire burning somewhere out of our sight. It rose from a rocky fissure in the open ground, circled listlessly into the air, and was carried away on the wings of the gentle breeze.

"The Lord be good to us!" said one of the men in awed tones. "We'se gotten on a burning island that'll belch out fire and melted rocks, like the volcanoes they tell of on the Peru coast."

"Sniff it, Garge, sniff it," said Pengony. "Smoke like that bain't come from the devil's stithy. There's brimstone in his'n, and this be honest wood-reek, or I never smelt my mother's fire. Lift up your bottle nose an' sniff, Garge."

Like a hound at fault, Garge sniffed, and as he sniffed pondered at some length.

"Ay, wood-reek, sure enough," he mumbled out at last, and relapsed into puzzled silence.

Meanwhile, Alec and I had advanced to the fissure and tried to look down it; but the pungent vapours made all the air in the shaft to dance, and at the same time bit our eyes so smartly that we were glad

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to draw our heads back out of their reach as quickly as possible. We could see nothing at all.

"I have it, Jack," said Alec, in a whisper. "There's a cave somewhere below us, and its occupants are cooking their breakfast; that's the meaning of the wood-smoke."

"A cave? Then it must have some other opening besides this chimney if there are men in it."

"Of course, at the foot of the cliff. If we go to that knoll in front there we ought to command a view of it."

"Forward, then, and we'll find out."

"Cautiously, Jack, cautiously! We don't want to bring the whole hornets' nest about our ears. We had better tell the other two to hide in the copse and fill their bellies with plantains whilst you and I reconnoitre."

We did so, and then crept cautiously forward to the brow of the cliff. The sight that met our eyes when we gained the crown of the knoll and looked out from amongst the graceful fern-fronds which sheltered it, was one to make a sailor's heart sad.

There before us lay a land-locked harbour, sheltered from outside view on every side, yet capable of giving anchorage to an armada if need be. Not a vessel floated on its smooth waters, and a solitary seal was swimming about near its upper end, now fishing for his breakfast beneath the surface, now erecting his head and staring anxiously about him. We paid but little heed to him, however, for at the harbour entrance we saw that which to any

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true mariner is the saddest sight in the whole world.

A finger of rock rose black and ugly from the soft, blue waters, and wedged into a cleft which divided it to the water's edge lay the corpse of what had once been a stout and stately ship, a snowy-plumaged carrack. Now, with her foremast snapped like a carrot above the round-top, a great yawning chasm in her waist, and rivers of clear water hissing into the retreating ebb from a score of starting seams in her sides—she was but a battered ruin, a ghastly wave-racked wreck.

A hundred different signs—the litter of cordage on her deck, the streamers of fluttering canvas hanging over her shattered bulwarks, the tangled fringe of broken spars and sea-torn planks floating like fallen leaves around her—all made it easy for a seaman's eye to judge that she had not lain there long; and the great storm of two days ago gave an exact date.

No sign of life showed upon her littered decks. The sun was high in the morning heavens, but her gunners were not furbishing up her culverins and falconets in the waist. No candle-trimmers were in the poop-lanterns, cleaning the glasses and refilling the sconces. No cooks were busy heating the great ship's kettle to boil the morning meal. The last sentry had left his post without calling relief. The silence of death was over all.

In the open channel which lay between the carrack and the landspit, there floated something over which

a dozen sea-fowl were screaming aud fighting. glance was enough to show what it was for which they fought: it was the ill-starred lover of a mermaiden-some stout mariner swept from the decks by a huge green wave, and then seized by snowy arms and carried away to a beauteous home amongst the branching sea-shrubs.

I could see in my mind's eye all that happened from the moment when he was loosed from his trance.

He yawns, stretches, shakes himself, awakens. The mermaid is standing beside him, glass in hand, combing her streaming tresses. She turns, meets his gaze, and speaks in words which fill him with delight. She puts a conch shell to her ruby lips, and blows a call. It sounds afar through the waving bushes, through the rainbow-coloured weeds, over the open plain, through the tangled forest. The brilliant fishes hear the note, and shoot away through the limpid water with its message. A school of dolphins cry holiday to their master, and come gambolling up to the tryst, to lie in a gleaming circle on the jewelled sand. Then follow troops of mermaidens, some riding on the backs of shaggy sea-horses, some racing along in shell chariots drawn by teams of emulous porpoises; and after them come the mermen, bearing posies of fair sea-flowers which wither when they meet the air. All stand and marvel at the mortal who has ventured down amongst the glories of their enchanted kingdom.

Then there bursts out a strain of delicious melody;

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and the mermaidens' chant, which rises and falls to the throb of the sea-bosom, tells the lone stranger how he must comport himself, if he wishes to endure in this land of his new birth.

And this did I hear them sing:—

THE GREETING.

"Welcome, bright welcome, O wave-cradled mariner; Welcome to bask in our beauteous realm.

Pleasure it is for the merfolk to minister

Unto a mortal beneath Ocean's whelm."

THE PROFFER.

"We are thy servants Lord, slaves to thy beckoning; Come let us lead to the great Sea-King's hall; Seat thee on Neptune's throne, 'neath asure covering, There to receive our best riches, our all. Gold of the galleon groans in thy treasuries; Jewels the chastest we'll lay at thy knee; Fruit-trees most curious blow on thy terraces, Flowers heaven-nurtured to brighten the sea. Pearls we will bring to thee, corals and cowries, Perfume thy robe with the grey ambergris. Men give their hands to thee, maidens their dowries; Never, great Lord, shall our fealty cease.

THE WARNING.

"But Oh Lord beware!
Have a care, have a care.
Keep thy beating heart still in its breast.
Have a care, have a care.
Good my Lord, Oh beware!
Love for maidens is not for our guest."

Love for maidens is not for the merfolk's guest. The man knows that it is true, and sighs as he looks

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at the radiant beauty round him—comely forms and soft white skins coyly half hidden beneath the trembling cascades of their silken tresses. He sits in the stately palace they have given him, and covers his face with cruel hands to shut out the light of a hundred lustrous eyes. In vain; those ravishing glances must prevail. The shielding fingers unclasp, the bowed head erects itself; and the man is lost. His heart swells within him; and half delirious with ecstasy, half mad with terror, he drinks deep down into the cup of pleasure, and feels every moment his amoured body becoming lighter, more fatally light.

He clutches the sides of his throne, and again closes his eyes for an instant. But only for an instant, for the lode-stone is one that none has ever yet withstood. The mermaidens see his strait, and stretch out their soft white arms, bidding him stay. Their eyes flash love unspeakable. Their floating curls caress his burning cheek. The perfume of their breath intoxicates him. With a cry of joy he lets his willing fingers loose their grip of the throne, and reaches out a lover's arms to clasp the nearest.

Fatal movement! Like an arrow he shoots up from amongst them, and their wail mingles with his cry of doom as he rises.

A swollen corpse, he floats alone on the surface of the ocean, and the laughing mermaids take themselves again to their interrupted play.

CHAPTER XIV

DON MIGUEL AGAIN

"WAKE up, Jack," whispered Alec, nudging me, for the sight of that floating corpse had thrown me into a muse. "While you've been sleeping, the snails have made up their minds to creep out of their shells. See, there they go!" And he pointed to some half-score of men who were making their way down to a boat which lay drawn up on the beach. A jag of rock almost concealed it, and it was only when we saw the point for which the men were making, that we caught sight of the boat at all.

"What shall we do?" said I. "Call the other two fellows and have at them at once?"

"No use. We might manage that armful, but no doubt there are plenty more where they came from. We should simply be running into their net."

"Are we to let them wander about at their own sweet will? Look, those fellows are off towards the carrack!"

"Can't help ourselves that I can see. So you'll just have to let your valour simmer quietly, old hot head."

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"We shall have a score or two of them up here pig-hunting for their dinners directly."

"Yes; they won't be content to patrol the shingle down there like so many harmless crabs."

"Then let's get to our raft at once, and back to Galley Island. There's no plunder to be made out of these fellows, so where's the use of meddling with them?"

"Plunder! Jack, I do believe you're the most thorough-going rascal of a sea-thief as ever deserved short shrift and a fathom o' rusty chain."

"Hard words, Alec," I retorted, hotly.

"But true words, though none but your sworn shipmate dared have used them. Hark, what's that?"

There arose from below a sound which caused µs to prick our ears to their sharpest angle. A body of men had emerged from the cliff leading some prisoners with them, and one of the latter was singing an English sea-song. The words came up to us distinctly through the clear morning air.

Sail away,
Hack away,
Plunder! (clank)
Gather all the valuables you can.
Come back,
Nothing lack,
Thunder! (clank)
Scatter all the money like a man.

His mates joined in the chorus, with all the devilmay-care recklessness of men who know that they are in too tight a place for their conduct to matter. The guards, however, seemed to think the merriment untimely, and did not spare their buffets, and one of them, catching the principal singer a whack on the head that knocked his cap off, exposed to view a smooth shining scalp that was as hairless as a mirror.

- "By all that's surprising it's Willie Trehalion," said Alec, in a whisper.
 - "Sure enough; but how did he get here?"
- "On the carrack, of course, but not as a willing prisoner, I'll go bail. Just hear how he's cursing! Confound the foolish fellow, why can't he keep his tongue quiet now that he's in their hands? We shall see him knifed before our eyes in a minute. We must let him know we're here."

And up from amongst the slender fern fronds arose the shrill "Peewhit, peewhit" of a plover.

Willie's solitary eye glanced for a second at the knoll on the low cliff's edge, and then he burst out again into his song as cheerily as if he were seated on an English tavern bench.

Presently the cortège came to a standstill, and three armoured Spaniards, seating themselves on boulders, motioned for the prisoners to be drawn up in line before them.

- "A court-martial!" I whispered.
- "Yes. Keep quiet and listen."

One of the Spaniards began to address the prisoners in English—and it seemed to me that his voice was strangely familiar.

"Traitorous heretics," said he, "do you make full

confession? Come, you dog, there, you with the crippled eye and the crippled hand, you who worst misused your trust, do you speak for your companions."

"Meaning me, Don Ugly-face?" quoth Willie Trehalion, with unruffled composure.

"Measure your words!" said the Spaniard, angrily.

"Ay, with a lead-line, not with a foot-rule, I bain't going to stint language just because you've promised to hang me in an hour's time. I tell you plain to your yellow teeth that I plumped the carrack on them rocks a' purpose. I could have fetched her in through the fair channel, and brought her up to snug anchor within a cable o' this very spot, and that without losing a spar, or carrying away a shred of canvas. But, Senor Spaniard, I didn't choose. An' if I'd got her again wi' a reef fine on the lee bow and close aboard, I'd up helm an' risk forty drownings i' welcome. So, Don Miguel, ye can wrap that in your cigarillo an' smoke it."

"Don Miguel?" said Alec, with a gasp. "I knew I had heard the voice before."

"Yes, it's Inez's father," said I, gloomily.

"Then we'd better not allow ourselves to fall into his hands. There are old scores against us, and Don Miguel is not the man to forget to wipe them off. God help Willie Trehalion!"

"Hush," said I. "He's speaking again. Listen." Willie Trehalion appeared to be enjoying himself down there on the beach. He was by nature a talker, and his subject seemed to have inspired him with eloquence. The Spaniards did not interrupt him, but it was little safety that I argued from their silence.

"Seven months agone, Don Miguel," said Willie, "you lured me an' these other lads aboard you craft at La Guayra, and gave us fair promises. I was to be pilot; they a crew to show your own lubbers how to furl a sail an' splice a rope; and for a reward we was to be given our liberty an' set aboard the first English craft that was brought within hail. We laboured willingly, and like fools trusted to a Spaniard's promise. We overhauled all your running rigging, set up all your standing rigging again, altered your canvas, an' made your carrack a seaman's ship instead of a soldier's as she was afore. And then how did you treat us? We had to lie on the deck all through the glass like so many willocks. with no shelter from the rains an' no shade from the sun; and if there was anything of a sea the spray drenched us through an' through at every dip she gave. Like dogs, we was given the dirty dishes to lick after your idolatrous stomachs were satisfied."

"Ay, ay, Don Miguel!" cried the boatswain, his voice rising almost to a shriek as he hurled out his string of accusations, "you can frown an' stamp your foot, an' put your hand to your sword-hilt, but you can't deny the gospel truth of what I say. If we did well, you thanked us with curses; if ill, you

blessed us with blows. Then when a small brig hove in sight, and drawing near flew a Plymouth ensign, we made bold to remind you of your promise. Ha, ha, ha! We might have saved our breath! A Spanish promise! A Castilian oath! Easy made. both of 'em — and just as easy forgotten. You sneered at us, and said we were doomed to everlasting captivity. Then you bade us bear arms against our countrymen, forgetting maybe that we wasn't born south o' the Pyrenees. We refused. You flogged us with leaded whips, clapt us under hatches, sailed a trifle nearer the brig; an' then feeling your courage ooze away, went bout ship like a lily-livered coward that you are, an' ran in under the guns o' La Guayra, where she weren't able to get at you."

Don Miguel's sallow face turned livid at the taunt, and I expected to see him run the boatswain through on the spot; for a sharp tongue is a weapon which more often than not turns its point back on him who uses it. With a violent effort, however, he restrained himself, and for the present let the squat, square mariner alone, evidently reserving him for a worse fate.

"Have your say out to the full," he said with an angry gesture. "There will be a bitter repayment when you have done."

"Thank you, Senor Jack Spaniard," replied Willie Trehalion coolly, "but it seems to me there bain't much more to say. When I've called a villain both liar and coward, I don't think I want to add any-

thing else. Other black words would fall white on him after those."

"Do you know what I shall do with you?"

"Hang me," said Willie, with a contemptuous shrug of his broad shoulders.

"You think so?" replied the Spaniard with a cold smile. "Maybe before long you'll hope so, too. But a rope would not pay one tithe of my debt. It will require a far slower death than a mere dance on nothing. I shall have a post let into the sand yonder at low water. You will be lashed to it. The flood begins to make about sundown, and there will be five hours for you to regret the loss of my ship in before you draw your last gurgle. I have often heard you boast that the sea and you were old friends, and that many is the pleasant tussle you've had together, in which the sea has been beaten. Well, you shall have one more duel together, and it will be curious to see which of you comes out the master this time.

"And now," he continued, turning to the other ten prisoners, "can any of you tell me how far we are from the main?"

"Happen a hundred league, happen two," replied one fellow, gruffly.

"Ah," said Don Miguel, looking keenly at the speaker. "And will you undertake to build a small craft from the wreck of my carrack to take some of us there to seek assistance? I promise you your liberty and a capful of gold pieces each if you will."

"No, you blasted cur, I won't," growled out the

fellow. "May my fingers be withered to the bone if they ever hale rope for you again, and may my eyes drop out of their sockets if they ever see to drive a nail for you, except into your coffin! That's my answer; and you won't get a different one from any lad here." And then he spat contemptuously and relapsed into silence.

His mates nudged one another with their bound elbows and burst into a leather-lunged cheer of approbation.

"That's it, lads!" sung out Willie Trehalion.

"Stick to it—never give way; an' these unsailorly lubbers will have to leave their bones on the island, unless the devil, their master, comes to fetch them away in a flaming chariot o' brimstone."

But at this point, at a sign from Don Miguel, the guards led off our poor English lads out of sight—into the cave, we supposed—and as two or three Spaniards showed signs of wanting to scale the cliff, we retreated to the covert where we had left our two men; in it we lay close all the rest of the day.

The time was one of plans and plots, of doubts and difficulties; but though we whispered together long and earnestly, yet so still did we lie that the parrakeets perched boldly in the boughs above us, and preened their brilliant plumage in the sun as though their nearest enemy were a thousand miles away. Great velvet-winged butterflies as large as linnets fluttered past our eyes, and mosquitoes bit our half-naked bodies—but never a thought had

we for butterfly or mosquito, for our minds were busy and anxious.

"Willie Trehalion must be rescued somehow," said Alec for the fortieth time, "even though it should cost us our lives to do it." And the rest of us eagerly assented, for our old boatswain was a favourite with us all.

The scorching sun above us, arching his brazen course in fiery splendour, began at last to verge towards the distant wavy water-line. The dancing air grew cooler, and was freshened by a welcome breeze from the sea. Cautiously we drew out from amongst the plantains, and looking sharply around to make sure that no one spied us, crept, all four, back to the knoll, and once more peeped from beneath the graceful fern-screens.

A couple of Spaniards were fastening a stout stake in a hole which they had scooped beneath the outermost of the ripples. They laughed and joked over their work as though it were some holiday diversion, and every now and then gave the post a shake to try whether it was secure.

When they had finished, one of them must needs lean his back up against the wood, and pretend in pantomime that the tide was rising around him; and to judge from the shouts of laughter which proceeded from unseen observers under the cliff, his companions found something intensely humorous in this gruesome clowning.

Presently there was a shout that the flood was beginning to make, and down they brought Willie

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Trehalion and lashed him to the stake. The other ten Englishmen were made fast to the outlying trees of a thicket that ran down to the edge of the beach, and when they were all secured Don Miguel once more addressed them.

"I asked you just now to build me a ship that would take me away from this island, and you refused. Well, senores, there are consequences to that refusal, and I am going to acquaint you with them. You may think I shall punish you to-day, but such is not my plan. I am simply going to let you enjoy the sight of a man drowning by slow inches before your eyes, in order that you may have the opportunity of observing what a peculiarly unpleasant exit from this world such a death is. To-morrow I shall again ask one of you to serve me. If, in spite of the lesson of to-day, he refuses, the rest of you shall see him slowly choked by the rising waters. The next day I shall try another-and so on. It will be interesting to see how many times I shall have to repeat this pleasing spectacle, but pray do not hurry yourselves to come to a decision. The island, senores, is a pleasant one, and I shall not be distressed if my play should run even for ten nights. It is a thousand pities that · the audience will necessarily be diminished by one at each performance. Adios, senores."

And with that he strode away. Some of the other Spaniards lingered awhile and then followed him, and the rest to the number of perhaps forty lit a fire and prepared to see the tragedy to its close.

When the kindly shades of night began to steal over the island we crept from our eyrie. A bush-covered slope led from the cliff down to the beach some hundred yards or so from where the prisoners stood, and down this we scrambled, avoiding carefully every little twig that might betray us by its snapping, and forcing our very breaths to come lightly lest they should stir the leaves and give the alarm.

The breeze had dropped. The air was heavy and still, and the gabble of the Spaniards' voices came to us softly through the silence. A slight mist had blotted out the stars above, and the only light we had was the fitful glare of the bonfire. It burned dully for the most part, giving out dense clouds of smoke that rolled slowly upwards till they were lost in the dark night; but every now and then someone would give one of the logs a stir, and the darting flames would for a moment shed a lurid radiance over the whole scene.

There in the creek we could see Willie Trehalion, with the waters already up to his chest, and his smooth bald head shining like a mirror in the flashing fire-light. Round the fire were grouped the Spaniards chatting and smoking; and standing out dark against the uncertain blaze were the ten forms of the bound Englishmen.

To cut the prisoners' bonds without at the same time drawing from them a shout of surprise, was work to make the least nervous fingers tremble. Alec crept up to the first, and whispering to him not to move a finger till he was told, cut the cords that bound him to the tree. I went to the second, and had just drawn my knife across the first cord when one of the Spaniards, whose ears were sharper than those of his fellows, heard what he thought were suspicious sounds, and strolled up to see what was going on. Motionless we stood as tree-trunks, and though he peered curiously into the thicket he could not see us, for at that moment, fortunately, the fire was burning dim. He was only half-satisfied, though, so he sat him down within a fathom of the feet of the man I had been engaged upon, and there remained.

Heavens, how slowly the leaden minutes dragged themselves away! Time had never seemed so long before. Every now and again, when the laughing talk of the Spaniards lulled, I could hear the monotonous lap-lap of the rising tide, which told that Willie Trehalion's respite was growing every moment more fatally less. I could see him too, when the dancing firelight fell upon the waters; and though his stolid face showed no sign of fear, still his solitary eye roved the shore unceasingly, backwards and forwards, looking for the help which it might be would not come in time. The suspense was awful.

Suddenly a voice from beside the fire called out, "Pepe you rascal, come and join in a madrigal."

Pepe rose, stretched himself, heaved a pebble, playfully at one of the bound men, and went.

As the first words of the watchers' madrigal rose round the fire, I drew my knife across the second man's thongs. Alec loosed the third man, and I

the fourth, and then a blaze of summer lightning flashed through the sky, and for a moment lit up the smooth shining head of our boatswain, whose chin was now being lapped by the hungry ripples.

There was a shout. Some prying Spaniard had spied us in the brief glare of the lightning flash! The madrigal ceased in the middle of a bar, and then—confusion!

CHAPTER XV

THE RESCUE

THAT tell-tale lightning flash came just a moment too soon, and put an end to any hope of surprising the Spaniards by a rush from the darkness. The other six Englishmen were released as fast as our swords could cut their lashings, and the band of us made for the interrupted songsters round the fire.

Fortunately for us, few of the Spaniards were armed, and before our fierce onset they gave way at first like a flock of frightened sheep. The ten prisoners had seized whatever weapons they could lay their hands on-—swords, daggers, logs of wood even—and were hacking and buffeting right and left like maniacs. But the Spaniards began to rally, and as the alarm spread reinforcements came flocking from the cave, and those of course were fully armed.

We were in a tight place.

"Jack! Jack!" I heard Alec shout. "Loose Willie Trehalion, and then run the boat down. The rest of us will keep these mosquitoes back. Quick, though, for the lives of all of us!"

Hitting out right and left I got clear, and waded
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into the water; but it was a full minute before I managed to set our old boatswain adrift. He was sobbing like a hysterical schoolgirl in his excitement, and tears of sheer joy were chasing one another down the furrows of his cheek.

"I can't stand, Master Topp," he cried, as the last thong which held him up was severed. "The water has made my legs as limp as packthread. Leave me, and save your own skin. It's no use my trying; I must just drown in my own depth o' water. But thankee kindly all the same."

"Not yet, Willie! You're heavy, but not too heavy for Jack Topp to carry, so we'll just ride you out of it. Besides, the water will help to keep you up." With that I hoisted him on my back, holding him with my left hand, and keeping my sword arm free.

We did not gain the boat without trouble, and my sword streamed afresh before we reached her. In went Willie, plump on to the floor-boards like a sack of grain, and desperately I strained every muscle to get her afloat. Inch by inch it was done, while the fight surged nearer and nearer to us. Every man of the English was far too busy to come and help me, but at last I got her into four feet of water. Rushing back, I joined in the furious battle, shouting to our lads to gain the shore as each man could.

One by one they scrambled into the boat, and the Spaniards followed shoulder-deep into the water. But they could not touch us there. Two hands

were lopped off as they clung to the gunwale, and then a few vigorous shoves with the paddles took us into deep water.

"Hasta la mañana, Senor Don Miguel del Cassamoro, late of Whitby," sung out Willie Trehalion, raising his round head with a great effort above the gunwale; and then we shot into the shadow of the opposite shore, out of sight of the Spaniards, and lay on our oars to count heads and examine our damage. There were thirteen men in the boat. Where were the other two?

"Davy Griffiths is gone," said one of the men.
"I seed 'im, with a foot o' smoking steel showing through his back, beat out the brains of the chap as put it there."

"Joe the cooper is killed, too," said another. "He an' the Spaniards' cargo-intendant fell foul o' one another an' wrastled on the ground. The Don had a dirk; Joe nothing but his bare hands. The Don carved Joe's hide into a fishing-net, an' Joe tore the Don's throat out wi' his teeth."

"It was a warmish corner while it lasted."

"Aye, an' we'se all more or less scratted. You've a rib there peepin' at the starlight."

"That's so. And you've a nasty hole in that nether arm."

"Tim there has half an ear shredded away, an' Jan Pengony's countenance is opener than ever Natur' made it."

" Where's the little cordwainer?"

"Sorely wounded-poor lad. He's lying senseless

here by Willie Trehalion in the bilge. This here clip on his head needs a surgeon's needle and pack-thread to caulk it sound again."

"Aye, an' Sam's beside him with a hole in the ribs. Sam's done, I'm thinkin'."

"Let me bind this rag round your thigh, Master Topp. Got that cut in the last rush, did ye? You're bleeding like a pig with a slit weasand."

"Cap'n Ireland, not scratched? The wonder o't! How did ye do it, sir?"

"No fault o' the cap'n's," put in Willie Trehalion; "for I watched him. No fault o' they Spanish devils neither. He was ever where the blows was thickest, and they rained them on him like autumn leaves in a hurricane."

"Good luck armoured me," said Alec. "Come, lads, out oars again, and give me one. Willie, can you manage to sit up on the stern thwart and steer? I've shipped the rudder."

"Aye, aye, cap'n! Or row either at a pinch. I'm nigh all right again now, though but for Master Topp I should a had to stop beside the post. They lashings had shrunk so wi' the water, that my feet was like a dead man's. Where shall I make for, cap'n?"

"You know the island that shields the harbour mouth?"

"Yes, cap'n. Shelter Island we called it."

"It's steep, too, on this side, but there should be a sloping beach to nor rard. Make round for there, and see if you can't put us ashore. Now lads, give way with a will."

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The night was pitchy dark, but the boatswain's solitary eye pierced the blackness, and steered us on an arrow's course till he made the Carrack Rock. Then bearing away a point to the westward, he guided us by the direction of the ocean swell, and by the fanning of a light westerly breeze which had again sprung up, towards what he judged would be the tail of the island. We heard surf pounding upon it before we saw a rock, and drawing on cautiously in-shore, coasted along in search of a landing-place. The tide was just upon the top of its flood, and not an inch of fore-shore could we discover till we reached the north end of the island, for up to that point the coast was bound by black rugged rocks that shot down sheer into the water. But here we came upon a sloping beach and ran the boat upon it, getting her three-parts filled in the heavy surf, for the ground-swell was running straight in. However, as the boat did not get staved, and as the wetting was rather refreshing than otherwise, we thought ourselves very lucky in our fortune. At anyrate we were free.

"Now," said Alec, after wounds had been dressed as well as circumstances would permit, and we had thrown our weary bodies to rest on a bed of short dry moss, "who can make a tracing on the chart of the future?"

"I should like another cut at they dons, cap'n, and with a better weapon in my hand than a charred wood billet," said one of the men, promptly; and a deep-voiced assent hummed round the assembly.

"They bain't got much worth taking in that cave o' theirs," said Willie Trehalion; "but there should be tidy pickings on the old carrack. There were a gould crucifixion in the after-cabin, an' a tale was going about that Don Miguel always carried his private hoard in the locker under his berth."

"What say you, Jack?" said Alec to me in a whisper.

"Have at 'em whenever we get a chance," I replied, briskly.

"Nosing the plunder, eh, old sea-thief?" he said, with a laugh. And then in louder tones for all to hear, "I'm with you one and all in not letting the dons rest in peace. What's your plan, Willie?"

"Stay here an' recruit till we are sound," replied the boatswain, "an' then catch them napping some night in their cave and smoke 'em like badgers."

"I fear," said Alec, "they will keep too good a watch to be trapped like that. But with our other lads——."

"What other lads, cap'n?" asked half-a-dozen voices eagerly.

"Has no one told how we rose on the Spaniards in the galley, and after taking her by storm were wrecked among the breakers?"

"No, cap'n; but it's brave news. How many of ye are there?"

Alec gave them an account of all that had befallen us, and told them the names of the lads who were saved. "And now," he said when he had finished, "launch me the boat, and I'll take this fair wind

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across to Galley Island and bring them back with me."

"Best take a second hand, cap'n."

"No; he would only be another to bring back, and the load will be heavy enough anyway. The boat has her mast and sail stowed along the thwarts, and this breeze will hold long enough to carry me over."

So we ran the boat down, waded out, and helped her through the breakers, and then returned to our moss beds, where in spite of our wounds we slept sounder and more comfortably than we had done since first we fell into the hands of the Spaniards, many months ago at the fight by the mountain torrent. Ah me! many a brave lad who was full of life and hope on that day was now asleep beneath the waves. Our search for El Dorado had not brought us much luck as yet, but we still hoped. And when men have hope, who shall say that any quest is vain?

CHAPTER XVI

THE TEMPLE OF THE SERPENT

WAKING when the morning's sun was high in the heavens, we found him they called the cordwainer lying stark and stiff. Poor lad, he had better have stuck to his cobbling bench and left adventuring in the Western seas to tougher bodies and more contented minds. For in life he was ever grumbling and complaining—as is often the case with those of his craft—and in death he made but a thin and weakly corpse. We gave him the best burial we could, digging the grave with sword-blades and piling it high with sea-worn boulders; and then set ourselves, those of us who could walk, to hunting for breakfast.

The search was not marked by any overpowering success. Our island was sparsely wooded with low scrub, but its parched surface bore no fruit trees. Birds there were in plenty, but we could not catch them. And so we had to be contented with a meal of shell-fish, of which, fortunately, the rocks yielded an inexhaustible store. At first we hoped to have been able to cook these, for many of us had seen the Indians light a fire by sharply rubbing a small pencil of wood along a larger block, and we knew

that Willie Trehalion, though he never acquired the true heathen dexterity, had often succeeded in imitating them. Now, however, we had not the proper sort of timber, and the various makeshifts we tried refused even to smoulder. So, as one of the Cornishmen said, "we had e'en to fancy ourselves hakey-fish, an' swallow the baits raw."

The chief thing, however, which made it imperative that our stay on the island should be brief, was the complete lack of fresh water. Search high, search low, we could find neither stream nor spring; and had it not been that there were a few rain-filled pools lying here and there amongst the rocks, we should hardly, under such a sun as now beat down upon us, have lived out the day. For from sea water no man, be he alchemist, be he wizard, or be he honest mariner, has ever extracted a drinkable fluid; nor ever will, say I.

After breakfast Willie Trehalion and I had a talk.

"There's half a gale blowing from the east'ard, Master Topp, an' like to come on harder," said he. "And there's too heavy a sea running for a deepladen boat to cross without swamping, let alone that if they tried to beach her she'd be knocked to nogginstaves in less time than I'd take to down a mug o' ale. So we needn't expect Cap'n Ireland over to-day, nor yet for two more days, mebbe."

"I'm afraid you're right," said I. "Well, we can only wait."

"Master Topp, a lot can be done in two days-

or even in one. I thought o' that yesterday when I heard your plover's call from the cliff. I knew that your old friend Don Miguel meant either to hang me or to dround me by inches-I'd heard him say as much. Now, hanging's quick an' easy work when both trees an' ropes is handy, but drowning by inches needs a rising tide, and that wouldn't be till nightfall. An' so, thinking as them who 'peewhitted' might be in small force, and might like darkness to help them, I just bully-ragged the Spaniard into letting me wait."

"It was a smart trick, Willie," said I admiringly, "though at the time I admit I thought it madness."

"Men's wits do smarten, Master Topp, when a clever dodge may mean the difference between staying in this world and going to the next before the proper time. Mind you, I wasn't to know that the 'pee-whit' came from an English throat, but it was worth chancing it anyway. I knew there wasn't no plover on the island, so it must be a signal o' some sort; an' as the dons didn't seem to notice it, I reckoned it was meant for me. Do you know how far we be from the main?"

He plumped out this question with such a jerk that I fairly started.

"I heard someone say two hundred leagues," said I. "But why?"

"That was said to diddle the Spaniards, as it's every English mariner's bounden duty to do whenever he sees a chance. But we bain't two hundred leagues away. Nor twenty.'

Again he shut his mouth like a trap, evidently with the intention of impressing this piece of information upon me. I nodded, and waited for him to go on.

"These here islands, Master Topp, is on the high road between Europe and the main; every ship as sails from an' to one or the other passes through this channel inside of 'em. Now, see here, this is the point I'm shaping a course for—there's a tall hill at this end of the big island where the Spaniard's cave is, and when I was up above just now searching for food I see'd a man within twenty fathoms o' the top of it."

"Likely enough," said I. "You can't expect the Spaniards to stick like moles in their cave all the time."

"Master Topp, that man had a faggot on his shoulders."

"Well, Willie?"

"Well!" echoed Willie, contemptuously. "Can't you guess what it means? Why, they've seed a ship in the distance, and hoping to see another they're making ready to signal her whenever she heaves in sight."

"Why," said I, glad that there was a chance of getting rid so easily of our troublesome neighbours, but for the present keeping that gladness to myself, "if they want to go we can't stop 'em."

"We must stop 'em, Master Topp! They know we're here; I've seed 'em watchin' us. An' if they gets hold of a ship we shall have the whole brood down about our ears in the twinkling of a handspike. Don Miguel bain't the build to forget men as has got to wind'ard of him in a squall. Don't you believe it!"

The boatswain was right. We could not afford to leave the Spaniards in peace.

"I'll come with you and look at this hill for myself," said I.

"But your wounded leg?" suggested Willie doubtfully.

"Pooh, a mere gnat-bite! The stiffness is wearing off already." And off we trudged—though truth to tell I found it no easy work to limp along—and laid ourselves down in the scrub grass above, in full view of the larger island.

The northern coast was high, green, steep, and without fore-shore, and put me in mind of the piece between Scarborough and Whitby. The harbour showed tide-left yellow beaches on either hand, with clear open water in the middle; whilst right before us, almost within stone's throw it seemed, lay the great hill.

The like of it I have never seen before or since.

It was a forbidding pile of stone, standing out boldly in its barren blackness against the rich greenery of the palms beyond, and towering nigh on 2000 feet above the fallen wave-worn rocks that fringed its base. Nowhere could the eye discover a trace of vegetation on its steep and frowning cliffs; and from the seaside at any rate it was a citadel that would baffle the nimblest scaler.

Its black heights were too desolate for even the ocean fowls' perch; its hateful crest could well have sheltered a ghoul or vampire.

The very clouds seemed to shudder and draw in their gauzy bodies as they scurried past its hungry flanks.

But after a mere glance at the mountain's sullen precipices the eye fixed itself immovably upon the summit, for there lay a wonder of the world.

That the thing had been built by hands was plain, for even at our distance we could see the joints and sutures between the stones. But by what manner of hands? Surely of giants—or of devils; for the size of the blocks was such that no human hand could have laid them. Each course was as high again as a tall man; yet there were eight courses. Each stone's length was twice its height; yet there were twenty of them in the side that faced us. A figured coping overhung the wall by an arm-span, and at the corners were huge carven monoliths representing rampant serpents, whose outstretched necks and gaping jaws pointed to the four cardinal points.

Gnome's temple, giant's pleasure-house, or magician's eyrie, it had stood there jesting the winds through the dim ages of the past, an everlasting monument to its forgotten founders.

And now, as Willie Trehalion had said, the Spaniards were laying wood for a signal fire upon the uppermost pinnacle. I could see two lusty fellows doing the work, and a third—a little, bow-

legged man, with a bright steel bassinet on his head -giving directions. I recognised that our lives hung on the chance of our being able to drive them away, but I saw no means of doing it, and said as much to Willie.

"Fight the devil wi' brimstone, Master Topp, an' you'll choke him. They dons practises witches' craft, say you? Then witches' craft shall be the word. See that round stone before 'ee, sir? Well, hear it speak; it's got a message for you."

And to my horror and amazement the stone began in a high cracked voice, to bid me send the boatswain across to the mountain so soon as ever it got dark, and then to trust him to settle with the Spaniards. "He's my very good friend, is Willie Trehalion," said the stone, "and as such, the knave dons will tumble over one another in their hurry to escape from him."

"Now, Master Topp?" asked Willie with a grin.

But I was all in a sweat with fright, "Avaunt," I said, "get thee behind me, Sathanas. Domine in Latinity had grown rusty with too long keeping.

"Pho, Master Topp! smooth your hair down again! Willie Trehalion doesn't dabble i' the black arts. It's naught but a trick. See, I keep my mouth closed, so; an' speak from the back o' my gullet, so. It took me many a day's hard practice to learn the trick, but by keeping it secret, it has served my purpose a-many times already, an' mebbe will again. Anyway, it will keep the Spaniards off that hill as well as would a regiment of arquebussiers."

"Will it?" said I, pretending to doubt whether it would; for now that I knew that it was only a trick, I was not a little ashamed of my alarm.

"Aye, that it will! Sure as it frightened you, Master Topp. So, by your good leave, I shall swim across under cover of the darkness-See, the water is quite smooth: those reefs to seaward break the waves-an' stow myself away in some cranny to wait for the faggot carriers in the morning."

"But if they catch you?"

"If they catch me," replied Willie carelessly, "there will be dead men on Cave Island. I shall take my sword."

"Four arms are better than two, Willie, though one of those two does carry a hook. I'll come too."

"Best not, Master Topp. Your great carcase would take a power o' hiding, an' that hole in your leg will get angry if it's carried about too much. Besides, if the plot fails, it is better that one should be gastados, as they dons calls it, than two."

"Nevertheless, I shall come. Two may succeed where one would fail; and as for my leg, it can still deal a kick that most men would be unwilling to stand against. And if I'm too big to be hidden in the building I'll find a covert in the nearest thicket, and be ready to make a diversion from the rear if you're attacked. So no more objections. I intend to go."

We waited with some impatience till nightfall, and

then, bidding the other lads tell Alec when he came, all that had befallen, slipped down into the water. We had few preparations to make for our swim, as the only clothing of which we could boast was a pair of trunks apiece, and those gashed with realler slashes than a tailor makes.

The sea was warm, and striking out leisurely so as not to tire my wounded leg too much, we crossed over and coasted round the foot of the cliff, seeking a landing-place. We found none till we were well beyond sight of Shelter Island; and then coming to a shingly beach we landed and lay quiet on the sand for a while.

The night was thick as a quickset hedge; and so, as there was small danger of the Spaniards spying us. we wandered somewhat from the straight track on the chance of finding food, of which we were sorely in need; and in this we were wonderfully successful, for after a little search we came across a rare grove of bananas. Next to the discovery of a thicket of roast beef and October ale no windfall, could have been more providential, for the bananas not only served to satisfy our hunger, but at the same time gave us food which we could carry away for future needs. So each bearing a brace of the huge yellow clusters we took a straight path towards the hill.

The ascent steepened as it rose, and finished in a well-defined stair hewn from the living rock. At the top a doorway lay immediately before us. passed its threshold, and found ourselves within walls

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as perfect as the day they were built; though how the courses had been raised to their position, unless by magic, puzzled me even to guess. There was no roof, nor trace of any. The floor was bare, save for wind-borne rubbish, and a great stone table in the middle, which looked as though it might once have served as an altar in whatever devil-worship went on here in byegone days. But no spot could we see where a man could hide. Save for a slanting footway that ran round two walls and gave access to the summit, the whole interior was as austerely plain as the coldest imagination could make it.

After a brief examination of the interior of this puzzle in stone we went aloft by the slanting footway to throw the Spaniards' pile of faggots over the cliff, and then set about exploring the exterior.

At first the dull light showed us nothing but a smooth, almost polished pavement; but on close scrutiny we found an inequality in the surface, near the tail of the great carved serpent that reared itself at that corner of the building which most effectually commanded the approach from below. A little burrowing discovered a hollow, which turned out to be a narrow alley just wide enough to admit one at a time. We cleared away the rubbish with which it was choked, and then entered. It led up a dark winding stair in the body of the reptile, and brought us, after a hard climb, to a tiny chamber inside the head. The gaping jaws formed a sentry-box, from which we could command the whole of the path from the lower ground; so, confident in the strength

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of our eyrie, I lay down to rest for a space while Willie watched.

We had not long to wait. Scarcely had I relieved the boatswain, and begun my turn of watching, when a couple of men broke out of the bush below and began to climb the steps on the hillside.

I motioned to Willie, and together we watched their advance. Now we should see what Willie's witchcraft could do.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TALKING STONE

WILLIE allowed the two Spaniards to get half way up the hillside unmolested; and then he broke out. With a shrill laugh which echoed to and fro in the gullet of the serpent and out through the fanged jaws in a very cataract of discordant sound, he raised a din which startled even me, though I now knew the secret of it.

The Spaniards stopped, gazed at one another with scared faces, and looked as though the movement of a leaf would make them turn tail and fly. Their ears told them that the din came from the stone serpent. But then, who ever heard of a serpent laughing? Not since the days of Mother Eve had such a thing been; and so, plucking up their courage again, they continued on their way. But at the first step the serpent spoke afresh.

In the best Spanish which Willie Trehalion could muster it called them scurrile knaves and cowards, and a variety of other choice names, in which the boatswain had a true sailor's fluency; and when they were thoroughly scared—as who would not have been in a like case?—it bade them 'bout ship and run if they wished to live another hour.

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And that these two doughty Spaniards promptly did, thereby making Willie rub his hook gleefully, and I my two hands, for we thought we had effectually frightened them—and all their comrades, to whom they would tell the tale—into leaving the hill alone for the future.

But there is a saying, "Never put value on a ship until you have broken into her treasure room." We had reckoned without Don Miguel. For scarcely had another two hours passed when a band of twenty armed men emerged from the bush below. The serpent had routed two; would it rout twenty, with the alchemist captain to lead them?

At the head came Don Miguel, and with him the bandy-legged, little chap with the bright steel bassinet, whom we had seen the day before from Shelter Island; and a couple of paces behind these two were the rest of the band, among whom we recognised the two doughty champions whose flying backs had given us a little while before so much satisfaction.

As the party drew up in the open Willie Trehalion saluted them with a shrill mocking laugh, which had the effect of making the rank and file turn round as if preparing to bolt. But the two officers dealt such hearty buffets right and left with the flats of their swords, that the fellows evidently thought that the danger of being run through by the fiery Don Miguel was a more pressing one than that of being devoured by a mere stone serpent. They stood their ground therefore; the five arquebusiers unslung their

crutches and blew their matches, the two bowmen fitted an arrow apiece, and the rest crammed their bonnets well down over their foreheads and waited for they knew not what.

"Come up, good senores, all," croaked the serpent's grating voice, when Don Miguel gave the word for advance. "Come up and defile this holy court, and commit any indignity that pleases you. Come and build your signal fires on my wall, and make my stones ring with your impious cursing. Ha, ha, ha! Pluck up your faint hearts, caballeros. I will not hinder whilst you work your wicked wills. Batter down these stones and hurl them into the sea if you wish. I will not harass you in the work; but afterwards—then—Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The serpent said no more, but the pause and the wild yell of laughter were sufficiently suggestive.

The Spaniards stood for a moment aghast; he of the bright bassinet was apparently the most scared of the lot, for his bandy legs shook visibly under him, and his sword clattered to the ground as he clasped his hands and began to call upon the saints to shield him. Had he been in command, every man would have used his heels as soon as his quivering muscles gave him strength to do so. But Don Miguel was different. He stormed, he cursed, he ground his yellow teeth, he all but foamed at the mouth in his frenzy of rage, and yielding to the greater terror of the two, each man stood his ground.

"Miserable coward!" yelled Don Miguel at his lieutenant, "what do you fear?"

"The devil," said the bandy-legged man, taking off his bassinet and wiping the perspiration from his brow with the sleeve of his doublet.

"The devil, you poor fool! Where's your wit?" Is not the devil clever beyond all human learning?"

"Ay, surely. We believe so," replied the other, crossing himself devoutly.

"Good! Then how do you account for his speaking such villainous Spanish as came from up yonder? Full half of the words were not understandable, and in those which did bear some faint resemblance to Castilian there was, or my ears deceived me, a strong flavour of the barbarous English tongue. Bah! Don Sancho, you're little short of a poltroon."

"Hard words, Don Miguel, and I may call upon you to prove them," said the other sullenly.

"Do it then. My sword is ever ready to back up they tongue. But first follow me up this steep, and if I see you behave as a man against the English devil whom I will unearth for you, perhaps I will take back part of what has been said. Forward!"

And up they came with all their following. The serpent sent down a perfect rain of warnings and curses, but they were not to be stopped again.

"Well," said I, when from sheer lack of breath Willie Trehalion had ceased his outcry, "they've got the better of us now, I fancy. Don Miguel will soon find the entrance to our snail's home. What are we to do, Willie?"

"There's two ways of getting at a snail's body, Master Topp," replied Willie, sententiously. "One is by boiling the shell, an' the other is by crushing it. Don Miguel can do neither."

"A pinch of salt, or a whiff of smoke will make him show his horns."

"Don Miguel bain't able to get nigh us to plant the salt—leastways I pities the man as tries to come up them stairs; an' as for the reek, they may build as big a fire as they like below, but we shall always be able to get fresh wind at the chimney-top here."

"And with our store of bananas we can stand a considerable siege on short rations? Exactly so. But I was not thinking of our own skins. I was figuring out how we might manage to trap Don Miguel, and now I think I see a way. You noted a small dark cell just at the foot of the stair leading up here? Well, my plan is this. You stay where you are and I'll go below and hide in that cell. Don Miguel will enter-if he doesn't come of his own accord I'll venture to send him a hail of invitation. He will pass me and go up the stair. Then I shall step out and deal with all who try to follow, and as two men cannot advance abreast it will be an easy enough task. As for the Senor Commandant, we have him between two swords, and ought to be able to take him alive."

"Master Topp," said the boatswain, saluting with hook and forearm, "your brain's sharpening right wonderful. The first jack of honest ale that wets my lips shall be drained to your health. But," he added, eagerly, "let me fill the cell and hold the lower alley."

"No. It is my plan, and so my choice. You have the post of honour, for it will be yours to tackle Don Miguel—and a tough customer you'll find him. But do not kill him, Willie, if you can avoid it?"

"H—m! I'm thinking I shall thrust guard-plate deep, Master Topp. You would yourself if you'd suffered one-half of what I have."

"Still, spare him. He's of more worth to us alive than dead at present. Afterwards——" I stopped. Great heaven! It was of Inez's father that I was speaking thus!

"Ay, afterwards!" growled Willie. "Afterwards, Master Topp! There'll be a bitter reckoning when Cap'n Ireland comes. You may lay your last tester on that. But in the meanwhile I'll thrust as daintily as the don will let me."

I picked my way down the windings of the passage in the serpent's body with the intention of finding out what the Spaniards were doing up above, and, if possible, of enticing them to come down from the wall and attack me in the narrow path. But when I reached the entrance I heard the voices of Don Sancho and a couple of the others just above me, so I crept into the cell to listen.

He first of all suggested to the soldiers that they should go first; but they hung back, and seemed inclined to argue the question. Now, the chasm was far too uncanny for the bandy-legged don to enter himself, so he settled matters by sending off one of the men for the superior officer, while he himself pluckily remained on guard with the other.

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Presently Don Miguel came, and snapping out a few caustic words about poltroonery, cowardice, and the like, dropped, sword in hand, through the opening, and strode along the alley. It would have been easy to run him through as he passed, had I been so minded; but hoping that Willie Trehalion would take him at his leisure, and with a reasonably whole skin, I lay quiet and let him pass.

His followers tailed on leisurely enough, and their leader must have climbed the greater way up the stair before I stabbed the first of them. The second played me a couple of passes, and by the time he rolled over, Don Sancho, who came next, was in full flight down the passage. I sped after him, but he was too quick for me, and sprang up amongst his fellows. The whole crowd then made threatening demonstrations against me, but not a hero of them would accept a civil invitation to come down and have it out man to man.

It was just like a bear pit. I was the bear at the bottom, who could not get at the yapping hounds above without being slain, whilst they did not dare to descend and bait me. And so, seeing that one of them had unslung his arquebus, and was fixing its crutch and blowing his match for a shot, I left them to amuse one another, and went to see how Willie Trehalion had fared with Don Miguel.

Their struggle must have been a short one, for when I came up to the chamber in the snake's head I found the Spaniard lying on the floor, with the squat figure of the boatswain perched on his stomach. The victor had a bare brown foot on each of his enemy's arms, whilst in his only hand he held, with significant intention, Don Miguel's own jewel-hilted misericorde.

It was a most refreshing sight.

"You be back soon, Master Topp," said Willie, without turning his head. "We have just this very minute decided who should sit uppermost."

At this the Spaniard drew back his lips in an evil smile, showing two rows of yellow teeth that protruded outward like a calf's; and I thought his face the most devilish and fearsome my eyes had ever fallen upon. Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he closed his mouth, smiled, and lay before us a pale, perfect Apollo. The suddenness of the change sent a cold shudder through me—it smacked so much of Popish magic. The boatswain, too, was plainly not a little disconcerted, for he set to work scratching his bare shining poll with the hook, a sure sign that he was puzzled; and presently—still without taking his eye from the prisoner—he rapped out, "Best kill him at once, Master Topp, for fear of accidents."

A flicker of fear passed quickly over the Spaniard's face at the words; but it was only a flicker, and in a moment it was gone.

"You hear, Don Miguel?" said I. "Have you any plea to urge why we should not kill you?"

"No," he said shortly; "no plea that you would consider adequate."

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I knew of one which he might have urged with success; but as he evidently did not at present recognise me, it was not the time to remind him of Whitby and Vigo.

- "Then, senor, you do not shrink from death?"
- " Quien sabe?"
- "Would you promise us immunity from hurt if we set you free?"
- "No, I will not; for you would mock me if I did. And"—he added fiercely—"my word shall not be held up to the scorn of any one."

This reading of my thoughts and intentions took me back somewhat, but after a moment's pause I asked if he would give his word not to attempt to attack us or to escape, supposing that I ordered the boatswain to release him from his present uncomfortable durance.

"Yes, senor; I pledge my honour so far," he answered carelessly; so I bade Willie rise. He did so, after some demur, and very unwillingly.

The Spaniard gazed at me sullenly and persistently, and as I began to feel eerie and uncomfortable under his stare—for I feared the Evil Eye, and those black orbs were baneful—I told Willie that I had something for his private ear. With a bow to the prisoner, which, considering that I was long unused to movements of courtesy, was passable enough, I led the way downstairs, and Willie followed, carrying Don Miguel's sword and dagger tucked underneath his right armpit. Some twenty steps below he halted, but I bade him go further

still, for I wished to be sure that we were out of earshot of our captive.

"Now, Willie," I said, when we had nearly reached the bottom, "why this gloom? Our fortune could not have been better."

"No," replied the boatswain slowly; "but we might have made a better use of it."

"Prove that."

"I had my steel at you rascal's throat, and you bade me stay it," was the reply.

"Understand me," I said sternly; "I won't have Don Miguel injured while he is in my hands. If for no other reason, because he can be made to serve us."

"Aye," answered Willie scornfully, "that he can! We've left him up there alone, and he can send a hail to Don Sancho to tell him how matters are. Who's to hinder him, since we don't seem to want to? Pho! Master Topp; d'ye think our bird won't chirp to his mates when he's got the chance?"

"I hope so."

"You hope so! Why, Master Topp, you must be bewitched. That bandy-legged little don will have another score of men up from the cave before you can wink."

"Let him. We can hold our snail's house against them."

"But not against starvation. They bananas is about done already, an' I'd liefer tackle a leather scabbard than the skins."

"How is the wind, Willie? Or has your sailor's eye deserted you along with your other faculties?

Come, tell me what you read in the sky up aloft there when you were sitting on the don's stomach."

The boatswain shot a look of perplexity at me; and then his eye brightened. He began to see my drift.

"Chopped round gently to the east'ard," he answered promptly. "Swell goin' down, an' big clouds floating high and unbroken. A murky night coming on."

"A murky night coming on! Yes, and what about Captain Alexander Ireland, and the lads with him? Will he sleep through that murky night, think you? Or will the boat leave Galley Island on the instant that darkness falls? I tell you, Willie Trehalion, my sworn shipmate will be at the cave's mouth before the midnight glass has turned, and it seems to me that he'll find his task an easier one if half the foe is sitting round the snail-shell. Why, man, I schemed for it!"

"And you were right, Master Topp," said the boatswain, half vexed at finding himself in the wrong. "I vow you be right, after all."

And with that we went aloft again, he to resume his interrupted sleep beside Don Miguel, whom we found lying down in the shelter of the snake's teeth, and I to take the watch.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TABLES TURNED

THE day passed, and after it most of the night; but just before dawn the relief which I had prophesied came.

Under cover of the darkness Alec had landed his heavy load of men from Galley Island, on the west shore of the harbour near to its entrance, but out of sight of the Spanish sentinels at the cave's mouth. Then he returned to Shelter Island and took off Jan Pengony and the others whom he had left there. The two parties joined, and, hauling their boat up high and dry, marched with silent haste round the harbour till they came to the flat before the cave. Here, leaving the others ambushed in the thicket, Iob Trehalion and Alec crawled through the grass and stalked the sentinels, who, as their fancied security had made them careless, were easily surprised and silenced. Then the rest of the party came up at a run, and formed a circle round the mouth of the cave.

The Spaniards, hearing the noise, came out to discover its cause, but after some three or four of them had fallen in the scuffle they drew back again into the darkness. Alec thereupon swore that he

would smoke them like so many flitches of bacon if they gave him any more trouble, and at the threat they surrendered at discretion.

After they had been disarmed and placed for security, together with the Galley Island prisoners, in a convenient aisle of the cave, a small party was left to guard them, and the rest, arming themselves with the captives' arquebuses, made their way to the Temple Hill to relieve us.

Completely shielded by the thick undergrowth and by the darkness, they were able to surround our besiegers and cover them with the arquebuses before they made their presence known. The first indication which Don Sancho and his crew had that they were trapped was the call to lay down their arms and surrender, or they were all dead men; and the gallant don, seeing the light of his own watchfire glinting on steel barrels all round him, cared neither to parley nor to fight, but did as he was told. And by so doing he probably saved many lives, both Spanish and English.

The long struggle was over, and now the slaves had become masters and the masters slaves. The Spaniards had lost not a few more men in the final skirmish at the cave—for there were bitter and relentless swords against them—but, except that the man called Sam had died of his wounds on Shelter Island, and lay buried there, no more English had fallen. There were thirty-two of us left, and each man ready and able to fight like a bull-dog if need be. We had many wounds, but as the poorness of our recent

entertainment had kept us all spare of body, Nature's unaided surgery would soon heal them; for it is only when men are full-fleshed and hot-blooded that wounds bring fever in their train.

Our prisoners were one hundred and twenty-two all told, and to arrange for the safest manner of disposing of them a council was held as soon as all hands had rested somewhat.

The Old Man, whose prophecies had brought him great respect, was fiercely anxious to kill them all forthwith; and most of the men—the older ones especially—were inclined to agree with him. Willie Trehalion, however, would not hear of it. He had recovered his skin cap, and now rubbed it fore and aft across his bald pate with fierce energy while he spoke.

"No, no, Old Man," said he; "it's ill counsel you be giving us this time. I'll kill Spaniards with you in hot blood as long as I can stand, and never ask for a finer sport; but to butcher them defenceless an' unresisting isn't an English sailor's job at all. It's a common hangman's work, that's what it is, and Willie Trehalion bain't going to sully hook or fist by doing it. On the high seas," he added, reflectively, "I grant ye it's different. There you can blindfold a prisoner an' leave the gangway open, an' then if so be he chooses to march overboard, why, it bain't your fault, and you have no call to bring the ship to an' waste time in picking him up. But this that you be wanting us to do, Old Man, is murder."

"Oh, ho, ho: Ah, ha!" laughed the Old Man.

" What dainty gentleman have we here? Why, Willie Trehalion, you with a face moulded out of a Portingale orange by four strokes of a marlin-spike, you with a body as delicate and graceful as a side of beef, you that have lost a hand and an eye in bloody warfare with these same gentle Spaniards, for whom you plead so prettily—are your feelings become so nice and finnicking that you blench and turn sick like a girl at the thought of a don or two dancing the devil's hornpipe on empty air? Is that you, Willie Trehalion?"

"Aye," replied the boatswain, sullenly, "that's me, if you like—a fighter with the best of you, but never a murderer."

"What!" cried the Old Man, angrily, "will you never learn? Have not their beatings, gaolings, starvings, cursings, made you suffer enough yet? Tender-hearted maiden that you are, you will let the wasps regain their nest once more, and then you'll wonder that they come out with fresh venom in their tails to sting you again. Come, Job, tell this dainty uncle of yours how you served the wasp that seamed that purple scar across your forehead."

"Crushed 'un," said Job, with a grin.

"Ever a fool was Job," muttered his uncle to the rest of us; "an' now he turns fool's evidence."

Job chuckled, and the Old Man broke out into his weird unearthly laugh.

"Oh, ho, ho! Fools both, d'you say, my pretty boatswain? Well, perhaps it is so. Job here, fool by birth; I, fool by Spanish torture; and yet both of us at times wiser by many a long fathom than every man of you. Never scoff at fools, my masters. The Emperor of the Indies has a fool for his Vizier, and a motley coat rules half the courts of Europe. Listen to me now. At times I can be the maddest fool of the lot; I can jest for you, rule for you, cast omens for you, prophesy for you, and all without sight of star or burning of mystic charm—but now, I do none of these." He hauled himself painfully to his feet, and looked round upon them with a gesture of frightful menace. "No. I bid you slay. Slay these cursed Spaniards from commandant to cabin lad. And if it be a crime, on my head be it! Slay!"

His voice rose to a shriek at these last words, and his listeners shrank back and shuddered when they met his eyes.

"Aye," he went on, "if it be murder, I care not. Look at these legs—like two gnarled and crushed old willows. Every bone in them has been crushed by Popish tortures. See these distorted arms, knotted like a conjuror's handkerchief. Gaze on this body, seamed with fire, scarred with whips and pincers. Aye, I am a poor cripple now; but a short score of years ago I could have thrashed big John Topp there as easily as he could trounce me now with his little finger. What could give atonement for these hurts? And yet I do not bid you torture these Spaniards in like kind; but only slay them. Slay them! Slay them! And then—then—"

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"And what then, Old Man?" asked the boat-swain.

"Then," exclaimed the Old Man fiercely, "make me your captain, and I promise you gold beyond your wildest dreams—I will lead you to Manoa!"

There arose a torrent of voices as he finished speaking. Some declared that Captain Ireland was our leader, and that the Old Man's words were treason; others that they hated the very name of the Golden City; and while a few called upon the Old Man to say more, the rest pressed Alec to speak. I joined my voice to these last, and by out-shouting the others, gained silence.

"My lads," he said, "there is not one of us here who has cause to love the Spaniards, least of all I, who have lost a father at their hands; but let us not sully our souls with their murder. No, no; we can do better than that. We can make them useful. We have a safe prison for them in the cave, and they shall be our slaves. As for Manoa, many of us who sailed to these seas in the Bristol Merchant have spent years in the search for it already, and the prospect of continuing the quest does not tempt us. But Spanish galleons and plate ships litter the main like islands in an archipelago, and every one of them contains treasure. Now, my plan is to make these our quarry; for from them a stout English ship can reap revenge and plunder both."

"So she could," put in one fellow; "but, captain, we haven't got that same stout ship."

"We have hands, sirrah," replied Alec, "and some

of us brains besides. The wrecks will afford both material and tools, and we have plenty of captive-labour to make the work light. There are artificers amongst us, and I myself have some knowledge of the shipwright's craft. And so I say, let us collect our plankings at once, and begin to set up the stocks on which to lay a keel. Has anyone of you a better plan to offer?"

The men looked at one another, and exchanged their thoughts in half-whispers, and Willie Trehalion, after hanging in the wind for a minute or so, rapped his hook against his forehead and came forward as their spokesman.

"We bain't altogether in love wi' galleys, Cap'n Ireland," said he, "nor with any other ship that's driven wi' slaves' oars. Ye see, slaves is apt to break out when you're fighting their friends, and requires a lot of victual an' attention, besides smelling mighty bad at all times. An' this company, being sailors all, an' not soldier-mariners, likes best to manœuvre in battle under canvas, and, in fact, backs one round ship to three long ones any day."

"And I am with you there, Willie. I did not mean that we should put these prisoner dons on a galley's bank and let them taste the bitters of their own prescription. No, no; leave oared craft to nations of land soldiers. The winds are the ministers of the Englishman, and sails are the wand with which he rules them. Give me a handy craft, and I'll warrant to keep the weather gauge of an enemy

without cumbering the waist with filthy slaves and telling off good fighting men to guard them. The Spaniards here shall be far luckier than they deserve. They shall work for us as shipwrights' labourers and shore servants; and when our ship is built and we are fitted for the cruise, we'll give them a holiday to dispose of their bodies as they like. If we return to refit or for any other purpose and find them here, well, we can enslave them again and make them useful. If we return no more, again well. And if we come and find that they have escaped, still well; for they will then be off our hands."

Here he paused, and at once there arose a strong-lunged shout of approbation, in which all joined with the exception of the Old Man, who remained moodily silent. The men were delighted with the plan and eager to begin the work of ship-building. They swore to follow Captain Ireland to the end, and promised death to the first man who should disobey him. Then they rated John Topp as his lieutenant, Willie Trehalion as boatswain, and Jan Pengony as gunner. After which, remembering the Old Man, and thinking he might work mischief unless he was humoured, they named him captain of guard over the prisoners, and promised to haul him a bombard ashore, with which he could belch langrage into the caye in case of a revolt.

And at this he regained his spirits instantly, and with a horrid torrent of "Oh, ho's!" and "Ah ha's!" assured us that before the month was a week older he would have occasion to shoot, for that already,

like an Andes condor, he could scent the steam of Spanish slaughter from afar.

Meanwhile Alec had the five Spanish officers brought before him, armoured but unarmed, and told them what he had decided to do with them. Most of them received the verdict quietly enough. Bandy-legged, little Don Sancho shrugged his shoulders, and saying that it was the fortune of war, hoped that we would set our tasks lightly in view of a possible turning of the tables sometime in the future. The sallow-faced commandant, however, refused absolutely to soil his hands for any man's pleasure, and set his snarling yellow teeth with the air of a man who intends to keep his word.

"Why, senor," said I, "John Topp counts himself as big a gentleman as you any day, and yet holds it no shame to haul and heave with those under him, or even to dip his sword-hand in the tar-bucket if need be."

He turned round sharply when he heard my name. "John Topp, is it? I must ask your pardon for not recognising you in the serpent's mouth last night. You were a little better dressed, I think, last time we had the pleasure of meeting, so my oversight is perhaps excusable. Well, Don John, my feelings on the point differ from yours."

"Take care, Don Miguel; we have a superabundance of workpeople," said I, significantly.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Hang me if you have a mind," he said contemptuously.

"Or we may follow your own device, and make

you fast to a post down on the strand yonder at low tide."

"You may drown me, senor; drown me by slow inches if you please, for I am to that extent in your power—but I shall not be your obedient servant."

"Oh, ho!" laughed the Old Man, who had just come up to look after his charge. "Ah, ha! stubborn and stiff-necked as I was. It does the Old Man's heart good to see such a lusty fellow. Let me consider now. What should be the discipline? Something novel, and telling, and appropriate; and humorous, too, if possible. Why isn't the pot-bellied little racker here? Dear me, at another time such a piece of pleasantry would be on my lips in a moment. Oh, ho! I have it. We will roast you in your metal shell like some great crab, most illustrious senor commandant. You're rather lean, so maybe will be a trifle charred in the process; but the devil, who will eat the dish, is not over nice in his feeding, and will forgive the cooks for forgetting to baste."

The Spaniard uttered no verbal reply, but shrugged his shoulders and gave a sneering smile which showed no departure from his previous resolve.

Then Alec spoke.

"Jan Pengony and Job Trehalion, slip off Don Miguel's iron shirt, and bare his back. Now trice him up to the lower bough of that tree. No, not by the neck. I don't want him hanged. Fasten his wrists."

Don Miguel's face showed its first expression of

uneasiness. "Senor captain," he said, "flogging to death is a felon's death, and I have done nothing to deserve that disgrace. If you will not hold me to ransom, at least kill me by sword, rope, or bullet, and let me die like a soldier and a gentleman."

"But I have no intention of killing you, senor," replied Alec, with a courtly bow. "Here, you men, go and bring the rest of the prisoners from the cave to witness the flogging. I am not going to have you whipped to death, Don Miguel, though the Old Man here is itching to do it, I can see. No, I am simply going to give you threescore lashes to-day on the bare back, and threescore more on every succeeding day that you refuse to work. You may get tired of your stubbornness in time, and meanwhile the example will be good. No, Old Man, don't hurry. Wait for the audience."

"Ten thousand times would I prefer death!" cried the Spaniard, with a venomous oath.

- "You are not offered a choice, senor."
- "You refuse to kill me?"
- " Absolutely."

"Ah! then I surrender. Your punishment is more degrading than your task. I accept the lesser indignity."

"So? I thought you would." said Alec. "Here, gunner, appoint this man to a gang and give him a task suitable to his strength."

CHAPTER XIX

A CURIOUS CRAFT

A WALL of stone four feet thick, surrounding a small, well-barred door, completely closed the entrance to the cave and made it a bagnio unbreakable. One solitary sentinel was amply sufficient to guard it; and, indeed, so confident were we of its strength that although we had on the shore-level storehouses and so on, surrounded by a stockade and earthwork which might serve as a fort in case of attack, we built our own dwellings on the plateau above.

A zigzag path from the shore led one to the upper level in less than five minutes, and once there all danger from the fevers which the clammy night mists of the harbour might give birth to was averted. The houses, built of bamboo and thatched with broad leaves, lay in and amongst a grove of graceful feathery palms, whose waving fingers fanned the hot air into coolness, and the natural garden around them remained as much as possible undisturbed.

Lovely flowers grew everywhere, framed in slender fern fronds. Orchids hung from the trees in twisted masses of rainbow-tinted colour. The leaves of the shrubs were hidden in a cloak of rich blossom. A myriad scents commingled, and the breeze was

fragrant with the essence of Paradise. Nor was the luscious picture confined to still life only. Strange insects, like animated jewels, hummed through the air. Painted butterflies, whose colouring no human brush could reproduce, floated from bloom to bloom. Lizards, like flashes of pale green fire, shot across from the shadow of one great plant to the shadow of another. And overhead the gaily-plumaged birds fluttered about or perched on the branches, and sang to the sun throughout the whole of his daily course.

Had it not been for the droves of steel-jawed mosquitoes which haunted our fairy grove, I think few of us would have asked better than to spend their days on such a favoured spot. But the insatiate bloodthirst of these insect enemies prevented us from degenerating into mere lotus-eaters, and the first spark of dawn was our call to work.

We worked hard; the English urged by habit and hope, the Spaniards by example and rod. A second boat was found lying in a rock-pool, stove-in, but repairable; and with this and the other one which we already possessed, the carrack's stores and cargo, and the jetsam from the galley, were safely housed ashore. Then began the heavier toil of unpiecing the vessels, stripping off the unsplintered planks and frames, the unbroken knees and elbows, and transporting them to the site whereon we intended to lay stocks for our new keel.

It was slow work, as anyone who has broken up a ship will know, for bolt and clamp and trenail had each to be drawn with curious care, lest timbers or sheathing should be split and so rendered unfit for further use. But time and perseverance were the chief factors towards success, and by lavishing both freely we at length finished the dismantling of the two wrecks, and carried or towed their contents to the beach in front of the cave.

It was then that the great discussion took place as to the form in which our new barque should be built.

Ever since we had settled in our upland village amongst the palms, Alec had been employing his spare time in carving and rigging a succession of toy ships. Nobody had taken much notice of him, for it was not his habit to court public applause, and as yet he had not asked for public criticism. He would work by the flickering firelight far into the night, and appeared so wrapped up in his labours that sometimes we would speak three or four times to him and not get an answer. More than once I fancied that he was under a spell, and wondered whether Don Miguel had the power of the Evil Eye. For indeed my sworn shipmate's manner was often strangely distracted.

Sometimes he would sit gazing moodily at his work; sometimes he would stare intently at the fantastic shadow-pictures which the jerky flames cast on the dark bushes at the edge of the circle of light; and then he would set too and destroy a greater part of the fabric he had toiled over, and start patiently to fit and carve it all afresh.

And the Old Man, who, when not on guard below, seemed always to be watching these attempts, would rub his shining hands and burst out into a weird "Oh, ho, ho!" of approval.

Now and again the modeller would take one of his tiny craft to a secluded part of the harbour, and, openly saying that he wanted no company, would test it, so we supposed. And how his playthings had behaved in these trials, we could always guess by the look on his grave face when he returned, pleased or gloomy, according to the result.

His knife had fashioned similar strange vessels in the old days at Whitby, where the unbelieving jeers of the shipwrights had made him destroy them; and though I and the others, looking at his new designs with the critical eye of sailors rather than with the partial one of comrades, pointed out to him grave defects and useless innovations, he would quietly bid us wait, wait, and not criticise the unfinished work until we could base our judgment on shown results rather than on the strange and unlikely looks of his new models.

And so in the long summer evenings, when our work was done, whilst Alec pondered and laboured, the rest of us smoked our cigarillos, drank palmwine, spun yarns of mermaidens and sea monsters and giants, such as Magellan found by the icy Southern Ocean. And sometimes we sang the old sea-songs of England; and sometimes again new songs of Spanish torture, of blood and of revenge, songs which the Old Man made for us, and which

he delighted to teach us to sing. Cruel, devilish songs they were, and the Old Man's weird laughter ran through the chorus like a demon's accompaniment, but to some of us their very horror was their charm.

But when the labour of collecting the planks and timbers was nearly over, by our captain's orders we others began building a toy ship of our own, designing her upon what we considered the fastest and handiest lines, making her, in fact, a model from which, as we believed, the larger vessel for which we had collected our material could best be built. upon our mettle by a challenge to pit our brains against the captain's, we spared no pains to perfect the details of our little craft; and so from boltsprit to mizzen, from the poop lanterns to the heavy round tops, from forecastle to after-castle, she was as pretty a plaything as the heart of a sailor could desire. And that when put to the trial she would prove fastest in sailing, quickest in getting about, and handiest to fight, her builders had not a doubt.

It was declared a holiday when the two little vessels were placed in competition on the ruffled waters of the harbour, and after stowing the Spaniards away snugly in their gaol (except some half-a-score who were dispatched on a pig-hunt, and afterwards were the cause of no little uneasiness to us), all hands assembled to see the trial.

Two courses were to be sailed: one a run dead before the wind, the other a trial of speed closehauled; for, as Willie Trehalion justly put it, "A haystack can drift, but it takes a tidy ship to run to windward in anything like weather."

Alec captained his own bark, and I ours; and when each navigator had trimmed sails, the two vessels were headed, with the wind straight off shore, towards the other side of the harbour.

As regards looks, our bark unquestionably made the braver show. Her square stern towered out of the water like the gable of some quaint old house, and her frowning ports commanded the sea all round. Her courses, topsails, spritsail, and mizzen bellied out in graceful curves, and her bluff, sturdy bow rode over the wavelets like some restive charger, and churned them into foam beneath her Proud would the pigmy captain have been who could have stood on that lofty poop and looked down at the pigmy crew in the waist below, as they passed in and out of the doors of their house in the She was a pretty craft, and one that forecastle. made a mariner's heart burn within him in joyful anticipation of her certain victory.

Alec's vessel caused no such thrill. She was low in the water, had no castle forward, had not even a raised poop, and possessed but one deck, and that flush through all its length. Her bows were sharp and much cut away, which augured ill for her safety in a heavy sea—though, truth to tell, she seemed to ride over the ell-high waves of the harbour as dry as our own vessel—and her stern was pared down to nothing where the rudder meets the water—a strange sight truly.

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But it was her rig which excited our greatest wonder. Her two pole masts had no round tops, and but little of shrouds or stays. Moreover, they carried nothing but fore and aft canvas—oblong sails hoisted between gaff and boom inboard, and triangular sails on the boltsprit. She had only four sails in all, and so strangely were they cut that there was no sign of bag in them (except when she was running free), and, in a word, they set as flat as boards.

Yet in spite of all, our vessel did not show the other craft her heels, but seemed rather to be straining every splinter to keep her place.

The two went ashore within three seconds of one another, and the men who were waiting their arrival took them up and hailed that Captain Ireland's boat was first.

Ah, well, we'd see what she could do on a wind. Not much there, some of us fancied.

Once more sail was trimmed, and the little craft were set to claw off a dead lee shore with what was to them a heavy beam sea running. It was a task in which many a well-found ship of great tonnage has utterly failed, as thousands of rock-gashed corpses can witness, and we for our part were unwilling to try it. Alec, however, said his vessel could thresh through, and so we could not for very shame refuse the encounter.

For the little galleon our fears were but too well-founded. Close-hauled as she was, with all her sheets well aft, like a sentient being she did her

very best, striving and striving to labour out to sea, but sagging more and more to leeward with every attempt; and at last a wavelet, a trifle lustier than those which had gone before, hove her high and dry upon the beach from which she had started.

But Alec's model was in a different plight. With never a shred of canvas shivering she reached out over the mimic billows, never swerving from her course by a hand's breadth, grooving her slanting path up the watery hills, and slipping down into the valleys, with her decks as dry as the burning sun above could make them.

Though smarting with defeat we could not but admire the power of this new sea-engine. She sailed some seven points closer to the wind than any craft we had hitherto clapt eyes on; her speed was incontestable; and, in anything like moderate weather, two hands could put her about with ease.

Still, though she might be agile as a panther, we were by no means in love with her as a battleship, and rained out objections in a perfect storm.

To these Alec listened gravely enough at first, but presently his eye lighted up, and he answered with an amount of irritation and heat which was unusual in him.

"To the ship-breaker with your clumsy applebowed floating fortresses!" he cried. "Noah's ark was not more unhandy in a sea. Look at my beauty, how she sits the water like a duck. Note her fine entrance. See how neatly the waters close behind her delicate stern, leaving no heavily dragging wake. And as for lofty sides being a protection against boarders, I shall manœuvre so that no enemy can ever get near enough to lay me aboard. And the lower your freeboard, the smaller, remember, is the enemy's target. You ask where are my castles on bow and stern. Why, you unobserving dolts, did you not hear before we left England that Captain Hawkins of Plymouth, was razing them from all his ships, as a lubberly encumbrance fit only for land-loving cowards who could not fight except from behind a stockade?"

And so he ran on, decrying every point in our ship, and sticking up for the innovations on his own so fiercely that, losing my temper somewhat, I ventured to remonstrate. But before ten sentences had passed my lips the Old Man interrupted.

"Oh, ho, ho!" chuckled he. " Empty-headed Jack, what a pity you're not a Papist. a more mulish bigot never stuck to a foolish cause. Why, my good numskull, you're always prating of your hatred for the dons; and here you are, trying in your crass ignorance to belittle the most cunning scourge that was ever made to swing against their idolatrous backs. I tell you, Jack, and you my masters all, I tell you-I, who have thrown you a dozen or so of true prophecies before-I tell you that von outlandish craft which is now working her way almost in the eye of the wind, shall work a deed the like of which no English bark, like manned, has ever worked before. She shall fight a single-handed fight with a great galleon, and capture her; and there shall be spoil such as the greediest of you scarce dare dream about."

"And so off cap every one of you to your captain, and follow his bidding without more of your ignorant questioning. Oh, ho, ho! 'Tis a merry world, but peopled with fools."

Close contests and heated arguments make men hungry: so when the trial of our toy ships was over we returned to the little village under the palm trees, with appetites sharpened for our supper.

We were doomed to be disappointed, however, for there were no Spanish slaves waiting our return with freshly killed pork as we had hoped. We hailed, but got no reply; went to the nearest rising ground, but saw no sign; and so, concluding that incessant hunting was making the swine more shy and difficult to find, we made shift to fill our stomachs with any odds and ends which the larder happened to contain. Afterwards, throwing ourselves down on luxurious natural moss couches, we blew our tobacco smoke up into the still night air and chatted over the events of the day, fighting the battle of the toy ships over again point by point, and not giving the Spanish foragers so much as a thought.

But when Job Trehalion yawned and said he'd turn in if his belly weren't so empty, everyone began to wonder what had happened to the pighunters to keep them away so long; and Alec, going to the top of the cliff, hailed the sentry on guard at the cave's mouth, to ask if they had gone straight to their gaol without reporting themselves.

The sentry said no, and expressed surprise at seeing his captain there, "for," he said, "you took boat down harbour come an hour agone."

"Why didn't you hail the boat, booby?"

"I did, cap'n," replied the fellow in an aggrieved tone, "and you answered that you was bound for Galley Island."

At this I broke out into a storm of abuse at the sentry for his stupidity, but Alec cut me short, bidding me waste no more time, but take a dozen men with me and row to the mouth of the harbour. He himself set off to a coign of vantage on the outlying spit, running like an untired man at the beginning of a race, whilst I with a crowd at my heels tore down to the beach.

One boat had gone, sure enough, and the other lay high and dry. We reached her, and found that the Spaniards had taken a simple method of preventing pursuit. They had removed all the oars, knowing well enough that we had none in reserve.

We could do nothing, for before we could split up new oars they would be far beyond our ken, as there was no moon, and in the darkness we stood no chance of finding them. So we hailed to Alec to come back, and after making sure that our storehouses were untouched returned to the cave.

At the door we were met by the Old Man.

"Oh, ho, ho!" he cackled. "So, Don Miguel and his fellow scoundrels have taken the first chance of breaking their plighted word. Didn't I tell you

that live Spaniards were more dangerous than dead ones? And you derided my words, and called me savage and murderer. Ah, ha! a merry buzzing hornet's nest they'll bring about your ears presently. Then maybe your squeamishness will pass away, and the sour blue Spaniard blood will flow in rivers. But if you were wise, Captain Ireland, you would give orders at once to light a fire of green wood at the mouth of the cave, and smoke out the rest of the hive before they too manage to free their stings. You frown at my advice. Ah, but you're young, my most chivalrous captain—young and tender-hearted—for as yet you've suffered only trivial injuries at Spanish hands. Oh, ho, ho! my words are wasted now, but maybe you'll live to see their wisdom."

"Old Man," said Willie Trehalion solemnly, seeing by Alec's face that a storm was coming, "stop your bloodthirsty babbling, an' go and lark with Nephew Job, your crazy playmate."

And the Old Man, after glowering venomously at his interrupter, did as he was told; and the two of them gamed with knucklebones for a maravedi a throw until far into the night.

Next day we laid the first plank of our new ship; and thenceforward the flat by the cave resounded with the dubbing of addices, the ring of hammers, the jarring of saws, and the songs of the workmen—a discordant medley enough, but to our ears the sweetest harmony.

First arose a bristling thicket of ribs, the bare unsightly skeleton. Next a skin of planking, rising

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from rabbits on the keel, spread slowly over the superstructure till it reached the deck-beams, and then continued upwards to form a strong protective bulwark, gapped with small row-ports and larger gun embrasures. Then tough trenails pinned the deck planks on their bed, and by-and-by began the music of the caulker's iron and mallet. When every stroke of axe or hammer was a stroke nearer to freedom there was little chance that the work would become wearisome.

Our Spanish slaves were useless except for porters' work, and of the English none had served an actual apprenticeship to the carpenter's trade. Yet such was the energy which our captain's enthusiasm infused into every man of us that, incredible though it may seem, I, John Topp, solemnly declare that the schooner Scourge kissed the waters of the harbour three months and four days after the first timber of her keel was laid on the stocks.

What a shout we raised as her stern swooped joyously down to meet the element she was destined for! Eagerly, as though flinging from her graceful sides the dishonouring taint of earth, she embraced the water. Her forward rush was stopped by the stout warp of esparto grass which bound her, and she swung sharply round to a standstill. And before the wave she threw up had spread a dozen fathoms, we made a simultaneous rush upon her clever redpolled architect, and hoisted him high above our shoulders

And when we had had enough of cheering for Captain Alec Ireland, some of us were uncomfortably hoarse; while as for the Old Man, he could not laugh above a whisper.

But the Scourge was a mere hulk so far, and not a well-fitted fighting ship; and so it was to work again without premature holiday. Masts had to be made and stepped, rigging to be designed and set up, and sails to be cut and stitched from the unpickings of older sails. And these labours, with the fittings below and the shaping of spars and such like, were not the work of a day or of a week. All hands took part in them except the Old Man, who was deeply engaged in the construction of some infernal engine near the mouth of the harbour, the use of which he obstinately refused to tell us.

Almost all the powder on the wrecks of the Spanish ships had been spoiled, and a handful or so from the heart of each barrel was all we were able to secure; but arms, small and great, and body-armour we found in abundance, enough to have supplied two such ships as the *Scourge*.

One would have thought, moreover, that the great Spanish bombard—which the old man kept trained on his prisoners in the caves—was as heavy a piece as a reasonable man could desire. But Alexander Ireland was not as other men. He argued that with our small crew a fight at long bowls would be our only chance, and so he set to work to devise a weapon which would enable us to do this. He made drawings, and then a model in wood, from

which he fashioned a mould of moist sand. Then breaking up a falconet and some small demiculvering and sakers, he built a furnace and crammed it with the brazen fragments of these pieces mixed with charcoal, and from shipwright turned himself to the trade of gun-founder.

And I must own that it was a deadly weapon which he turned out. For although the gun had none of that ornamentation which one looks for in a piece that is to earn a high repute, still it could not fairly be judged by the standard of other weapons, because it differed from every gun that had hitherto been cast. It was fearfully cumbersome in the breech, and down to where the trunnions lay; but from that point forward it tapered throughout the whole of its enormous length, which was a full foot and a half beyond the fathom, until just round the muzzle it swelled out to form a strong ring. He made a carriage for it, too, as unique in construction as the gun it bore. and planted it right amidships between the masts. The piece could be fired from a large port on either side, or over the bulwark if need be; so that except directly ahead or astern, its deadly pelting commanded every point of the compass. With this powerful weapon, and the culverins and falconets mounted on either broadside, we had as much artillery as we could man.

But our powder room was empty.

. This was a most serious gap in our defence, and one which for lack of materials we could not remedy.

One jester, indeed, said that we could get charcoal from the woods and sulphur from the Spaniards' oaths, so that we required only saltpetre to start our manufactory, but even on this showing we were no better off, for we had not the saltpetre. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to run our first prize by the board and take her hew-and-thrust fashion, and then to use the powder she carried to load our weapons against her friends.

We had, it is true, saved a few handfuls of the precious black dust from the carrack's hold, and at one time had counted upon using that to fire half-adozen lusty broadsides; but every grain of it was blown away to smoke by the Old Man before ever the *Scourge* dropped down harbour.

He had, as I have said, been for some time engaged in constructing a mysterious engine, whose form and purpose were known to himself alone. Its site was amongst some rocks on the spit at the harbour's mouth, but none of us had seen it; for since the Old Man had promised to launch his deadliest curse at the head of anyone who pried into his secret, we all kept widely aloof.

Still, we were not a little curious; and madman though he was, we trusted him. Consequently when it was reported that a large ship flying the Spanish flag was making dead for the mouth of the harbour, our first thought was that we were trapped, and our second that the Old Man would save us.

He had boasted that his infernal machine would cope single-handed with the proudest ship in the

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Spanish navy; and if he failed us now, after having taken possession of all our small store of powder, then the Spaniard might moor in the harbour and batter our new vessel to noggin-staves at his leisure, and we could not hope to prevent him. We had not a stitch of canvas bent to the spars, not a sweep fitted to the row-posts. The boat would hold only twelve men, but as a forlorn hope we had it manned and ready behind the shelter of Carrack Rock, near which the fair-way ran. In it were crammed those of us who could not swim. The rest were to take to the water sword in teeth. And each was to board the invader as best he could.

A desperate enterprise surely, but it was the time for desperate enterprises, for if the newcomers were to land and release their countrymen from the cave, neither strategy nor force could save us. It must be a fight to the death, and truth to tell, there was not one of us who had not rather have died than trust again to mercy from a Spaniard.

CHAPTER XX

"NO OINTMENT LIKE SPANISH BLOOD"

N came the majestic Spaniard, bowing gravely and proudly over the rolling seas. She was close-hauled on the starboard track, and her bellying courses and topsails strained heavily on the sheets. Standard, pennant, and banner hung from trucks and poop-staff, and the painted taffety as it fluttered out to leeward was more suggestive of gala day revels than of fighting. But to-day her guns were not loaded with blank saluting charges.

When she drew nearer she hauled up her courses in their brails, stowed her mizzen and spritsails, and came running in under her two topsails only, and we could see for ourselves how heavy was the metal and how numerous was the crew she carried. The ports were triced up, and through them gaped ugly yawning gun muzzles.

The gunners were at their posts; the blue smoke from the linstocks rose lazily from the waist until the breeze caught it and hurried it to leeward; and ever and again the sun would glint from a shining pike head or sword blade. Few men were visible, and those, as their hoarse sea-hauling cries indicated, were merely sailors. But though we could not see them, we could guess what a mass of armed men

seethed within the lofty walls of that floating fortress.

To attempt the capture of such a stronghold by simple escalade, without ladders, without hooked poles, with nothing but our own strong figures and the stimulus of a desperate cause, seemed a forlorn hope indeed, and of our little band many a tough sea warrior who had grinned death in the face a score of times, believed that now at last his time had come, and hoped for nothing more than to deal a berserk blow or two before the swarming soldiers spilled his life with a sword thrust. But not a man shrank from the battle. Most of us discarded helmet and all else except sword or axe, and at Alec's word strode down the rocks and into the water.

But where was the Old Man and the marvellous engine of which he had boasted? Where was the vaunted destruction which he was to deal out to just such a foe as this? Had he failed us? Ah, well! a crazy man is a cracked reed to lean upon, and perhaps we were fools to hope that the Old Man could save us.

"Off with the boat, there," cried Alec, cheerily; "and, Jan Pengony, lead your lads to board at the waist. We others will swim till our claws touch the beak, and if we once get a hold, I warrant will not leave go till we've made this big sea-fowl as harmless and succulent a morsel as a well-hung hen pheasant. Our heads in the water will be small marks for their cannon, so they won't waste powder by firing their large pieces. All the better for us. There'll

be the more to stow in the Scourge's powder-room. Have at 'em! England for ever is the cry, and mark how that herd of hinds will quail when they hear it."

And so into the water we slipped, and going straight out from the shore, waited with quick-beating hearts for the great vessel to come down to us.

On she drove with steady, cruel power, gashing the little wavelets with her beak and crushing them contemptuously beneath her apple bows, stately as a rock that is stepped in the earth's centre. But of the bobbing heads in the water and of the boat creeping out through the rocks, she had not as yet taken the smallest notice. The suspense was fearful.

Presently a sentry spied us and gave the word. The big ship woke up with a scurry and bustle. The trumpeter made his noise, and some arquebusiers clapping matches to the priming of their pieces sent a few maravedis' worth of lead screaming over the heads of the unsoldierlike heretics who were adopting this unrecognised means of attack. They effected little, however, beyond satisfying themselves that they had obeyed orders.

But soon a deadly arrow shower commenced from behind the bulwarks and from the round-tops, by which the water here and there was reddened, and the strength of more than one stout fellow tapped. The doors of the forward castle opened, and a detachment of mail-clad soldiers trooped out to guard the beak.

Armoured men at the top of a high, steep wall against naked men in deep water at its foot—there

could be small doubt what the issue of such a combat would be. But, little though we liked it, it was a trial from which we dared not shrink; and so with grim determination to do, or perish in the trying, we swam with slow steady strokes to meet the Spaniard, each man of us looking out eagerly for the best point to board. In another half minute we should be facing the climb, and making vicious sword-thrusts at the axemen who lopped at our limbs from above. Ah, well; it would be a speedy death.

But as it happened, there was to be no rasping of steel against steel just then.

With a sudden roar, like the bursting of a thunder-bolt, a spout of fire darted from the cluster of rocks on the outlying spit, and in the midst of it rode a huge boulder, bigger than a soldier's sentry box. It hustled through the air with a din like the humming of millions of ricochetting bullets, and struck the Spanish ship just abaft of midships, close to the break of the poop. Smith and carpenter never put together gear that would have withstood the shock of that bolt. The solid timbers splintered and broke as though they had been maize-husks, and the mighty boulder ate its way through fabric and cargo, and fell with a sullen splash into the sea at the other side.

The waves trembled with the shock, and the proud ship reeled to her larboard beam ends, and then righted again with such a strain that the wounded backbone crunched in two with the effort. The mainmast and its gear lay floating on the water. Guns slid from the lower deck like so many

pebbles. The fore round-top leaned aft till it fouled the golden flag of Spain flying from the mizzentruck, and the bowsprit stood once more as it had done when, leaved and branched, it sprouted heavenward from some Castilian sierra in the old world.

The grim sea-wolves, carrion hunters of the ocean, darting up from the caverns of the sea, fixed their talons on the shattered wreck, and drew it down through the swirling eddies to the dark jungles below; and as each heavily-armoured Spaniard fell off into the waves, he was seized by the soft arms of a foe more relentless than even the Inquisition-seared Englishman, and strangled by a liquid caress that knew no refusal. Thus did the sea avenge the dishonours with which Spanish slave-galleys had tainted her.

It was all over in a few seconds, and before the minute had elapsed, save for here and there a morioned head beside a fragment of wreckage, the harbour ripples were unflecked by anything stouter than their own flowery foam.

We English, seeing that our work was already done, swam ashore directly the shot was fired, and now stood in admiring wonder opposite the mouth of the great rock cannon which had worked this awful havoc. The air still bore the choking taint of powder smoke, and the gnarled, nude figure of the Old Man, crouching there, still holding his lighted match in an ecstasy of demoniac joy beside the touch-hole of his infernal machine, seemed rather that of a fiend than of one born of mortal mother.

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"Ah, ha, ha!" he cried. "See what the Old Man can do when you heavy dolts leave him for a time in peace. See how he repays in part the wrongs that Spanish torments have worked upon his body. Oh, ho, ho! 'Tis meat and drink to me to have a day like this. Aye, gape at the engine; a sweet rustic engine, my masters, is it not? You may find its fellow in the narrow strait of Dardanelles, which the Grand Turk holds, that neither Venetian galleass nor Genoese galley may follow the booty-laden corsair to his pagan lair in the Euxine."

"What, my noble captain, you look black at me? Come, let no sour faces greet the Old Man on his triumph day. It was powder you lusted after, was it? And my brawny Jack here had an eye to the other pickings. Yes, and you too, my hookhanded boatswain. When I saw your smooth poll and puffing mouth bobbing over the wavelets like some old dog seal's, there was greed for gain in that solitary eye of yours, shining out as clearly as though you carried a placard on your neck with the words written in black and white. Not a cruzado, not a noggin of powder, scarcely a rope-yarn is there left for you to seize. But for me-I had rather have done this day's work than be at this present moment holding the emperor of the Indies to ransom. Oh, ho, ho! there's no ointment like Spanish blood. The throbbing pain in the Old Man's joints will be easier to-night."

CHAPTER XXI

POWDER AND PEARLS

As we had abundance of victuals and water, and were in nowise pressed for time, as soon as the Scourge was ready for sea, we took her for a week's cruise through the desert sea to the northward of our island. This was the more necessary as, except our captain, none of us had more than the vaguest notions of fore-and-aft seamanship, and it would have been a fool's counsel to think of fighting till we had got all hands used to the feel of their new ship.

We were returning from this cruise, well satisfied with what we had seen and learned, and were within sight of the Temple of the Serpent on Cave Island, when Alec called a general council.

The question he put to us was—what to do next.

There was no lack of suggestions. One proposed that we should cruise along the main straight away; another thought we had better run into harbour again, and lying snug there, plant a look-out on the mountain, who should give us word when a suitable quarry hove in sight. One man added this bit of advice and another that. But when each man who

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had anything to say said it, and there were almost as many plans afloat as there were men; Willie Trehalion, who had been standing straddle-legged by the bittacle, and rubbing his skin cap fore and aft across his bald pate—as he always did when his thinking machinery was at work—took a step forward and put in his word.

"There's an island hereabouts," he said, "lying some fifteen leagues s'uth'ard an' west'ard, that should yield some good pickings to them as goes adventurin' on it."

"An island with pickings!" said Job Trehalion.

"Then there's Spaniards on it too, uncle."

Willie took no notice of him. "Margherita's the name of it," he went on. "Some o' ye may ha' heard of it, but all o' ye may not know that the Spaniards has got three towns planted there to look after the pearl fisheries. Now pearls bain't gould. But pearls is what the Queen's own Majesty wears sewed about her gown, and so it bain't for the likes of us to turn up our noses at em'. Besides, there's Spaniards there to collect 'em from the pagans as brings up the pearl-oysters from the sea-floor, an' where there's Spaniards you can lay your teeth on't there's powder as well."

"And you suggest, Willie?"

"That we harry a town on Margherita."

Job chuckled. "A whole town would make a big mouthful," said he. "Happen it might squirm about when we was tryin' to swallow it, an' choke us." "Always a fool, Job," replied his uncle, sourly, "an' but one peg removed from a natural. But I never thought to call nephew of mine lily-livered."

The big dark scar which seamed Job's face flashed out and grew purple, and he stepped forward with hands clenched and lips mumbling. And no wonder, for, as everyone knew, there was not a braver man on board.

Willie did not move a muscle.

"Stop!" cried Alec, sharply. "I allow no quarrelling on board the Scourge. Job's objection is a reasonable one, and deserves a reasonable answer. There's nothing of the coward about him; and, Willie Trehalion, every man on the Scourge will tell you so. He has faced death at your side and at mine many a time, as I ought not to have to remind you. But enough of this. What is the size of these Spanish towns you speak of, and how do they lie?"

"There's Pampatas at the east-sou'-east," replied Willie Trehalion, gruffly, "and there's El Pueblo de la Mar a league to leeward o' that, an' there's El Pueblo del Norte on the north side."

- "And their strength?"
- "I don't know, nor their size either. But they're not so big as London, nor Bristol, nor Whitby itself mebbe."
 - "Which of them would suit our purpose best?"
 - " Pueblo del Norte."
 - "Because?"
 - "Because it's nighest, Cap'n Ireland."

- "Could you pilot us there?"
- "Yes, cap'n, with a couple o' careful hands at the lead. I see'd the place marked on one o' they rubbishy Spaniards' charts; but the lubbers hadn't marked down the fairways into the harbour. The island is steep-to, an' rocky on the sea face, though, so there should be water enough."
- "We'll try," said Alec. "So we'll 'bout ship now, boatswain, and shape a course for the Island of Margherita!" And then in a lower tone. Willie, I don't want you to sail the Scourge into any harbour which masked batteries and unknown currents may turn into a death-trap for her. her a short sea-mile off the town and then lay-to. We can do the rest in the boats. If this wind holds we should, with luck, be within hail of El Pueblo del Norte when its doughty townsfolk have their shoes off and their nightcaps on."

And bidding all except the watch turn in, so as to come up fresh when work was on hand, Alec and I went below.

- "You are doing this against your own judgment, Alec," said I.
- "Yes; not because I fear to fail, but because street fighting may cost us a life or two. And, heaven knows, we haven't a man to spare."
 - "But the pearls, old lad."
- "Aye, Jack! The pearls!" he answered, bitterly. "They fired you up as they did the men forward. Not one of you cares how many of his fellows fall so long as his own chest bursts with treasure. And

once the hatches cover what you think enough, there'll be a common cry, I warrant, for the eastward cruise. Eh, Jack?"

"Grammercy, Alec! You'd not stay holding on and off this sweltering coast longer than we have to, would you?"

"Yes," he cried, fiercely; "I'd stay till we'd driven every Spaniard back to the devil who spawned him. I'd stay till we'd given the country back to the Indian it was stolen from, or till we'd peopled it with honest English hearts. And, mark me, Jack, that's what it will come to. Our people at home are increasing every day, and the island that holds them isn't. Look at London; look at Bristol. They're big, overgrown cities even now, and they're still growing. Where, think you, must the overflow drift to? I'll tell you. When bread begins to fail them, as it soon will, and the little ones begin to cry to their fathers for food, they will pour out to the West here. Raleigh and his friends planted a faint-hearted crew in a more northern land. so I have heard, among savages and snowstorms and barren rocks; and, as might have been expected, those that did not die came back wailing over their miseries and cursing the men who had led them away from England. But here, I tell you, it is The Tierra Firme bristles with Spanish different. towns. There are Cumana, Barcelona, La Guayra, Caraccas, Valencia, Carthagena, and all those in Mexico besides. And in every one of them the cursed Inquisition of Spain tortures and burns

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unhindered, and makes the very gardens of God's earth into foul blaspheming hells. I ask you, what nobler aim could a man have in life than to wrest this fair land from these cowled and mitred demons, and to bring it instead under the sway of Elizabeth of England?

"Jack Topp," he went on, flushing deeply, and gripping my arm till I fairly winced, "I swear to you that if I get back home from this voyage with sound skin and sufficient booty for the purpose, I will get a charter and fit out an armada—at my own costs, if no one else will join me—and I'll sail for the Main here, and take every town as I pass along. The West is the treasury of Spain, and if her power be once broken out here in the New World, there's little doubt as to who will be Queen of the Seas over yonder in the Old."

He broke off suddenly and went to his bunk, and I turned away to mine. For, truth to tell, I had little heart to argue with one who was as eager for profitless battle as any paladin of the Crusades, with never an eye for the plunder which should follow a good fight. Many a hard blow have I taken and given, but it is a sport I care little for, unless behind it there is that which will pay for the broken heads and damaged limbs. And to give credit where it is due, no man can say that John Topp was ever backward in a fight against those who were defending goods or treasure. But be that as it may.

The sun was balancing over the western waterline when I came on deck again, and the cliffs of Margherita were showing in a low dark line, fine on the lee bow.

Willie Trehalion was steering with his one brawny hand on the tiller, and the tiller-rope cast on to his hook with a couple of half-hitches. His one eye took an occasional squint aloft and then roved once more along the land ahead. The vessel was rising it rapidly, charging the short seas with her sharp stem, and riding over them dry-decked like the beauty she was. Our Scourge was a craft of which every man of her crew might well be proud. There were none of those dull swishing thuds of green wave against round apple bow, which cause a ship to stop and shudder, as though cringing under a blow. The motion was gliding, oily, and pleasant. And the pace was so great that we deemed it advisable to stow the foresail and hoist the maintack, lest if we allowed ourselves to come into sight in the day time, the dons of Margherita should suspect our intent and make ready an uncomfortably warm reception for us. We could not afford to risk. by such a piece of carelessness, the loss of our dainty racer.

Night fell; dark, moonless, starless, but without rain or haze; just such a night as our purpose asked for. All hands were on deck, eager and expectant, for word had been passed that El Pueblo del Norte was close under our lee.

Now there is, and has been from time immemorial, a custom amongst fighting men to put on their best clothes to do battle in. The sea dandy of the

queen's ships would turn out in all the bravery of puffed and bolstered hose and trunks, and with a starched ruff-circle as big as a puncheon-head cumbering his chest. But we wore our best and worst clothes every day; in fact, had no more than one suit apiece, and that a skimpy one. We could not, therefore, honour the conflict by much change of apparel. True, there was Spanish body armour in plenty if we had cared to put it on; but body armour has never found much favour with English sailors, and moreover it was monstrous heavy and uncomfortable. So with the exception of a metal helmet apiece, which Alec insisted that each of us should wear, we prepared to go into battle protected only by our own quick sword-play and the supple strength of our iron muscles.

And when the Scourge was hove to, and the boats dipped into the water, there scrambled into them surely the most ragged, tattered, and unkempt crew that had ever set out to capture a town. Most of us lacked shoes and hose, some of us wanted even a shirt, but—though a scarecrow would not have taken our clothes at a gift—every man was armed to the teeth with jewel-hilted sword and daggers, and our hopes told us that we were like soon to have other gear to match the quality of our side arms.

Silently and slowly the boats crept on towards the town. We had crammed every man of our crew into them, with the exception of the Old Man, who was left in charge of the *Scourge*. We were not pressed for time, as the dons would hardly be in

their first sleep yet. So we paddled easily, keeping a keen lookout and cursing in a whisper the man who allowed his oar blade to raise the slightest splash. I tell you, to some of us the effort of that strained silence was harder work than it would have been to raise a hearty cheer and race to the landing through a hail of Spanish bullets.

Once, Alec's boat got on a ledge of rocks, and her crew had to climb overboard and lift her into deep water, and once mine had to be eased over a shoal. But no damage was done to either of them, and the quietness with which we worked prevented any tell-tale sound from reaching the shore.

Foot by foot we crept on, feeling our way by instinct, as it were, through the velvety darkness. Not a light showed from the sleeping town, and but for the loom of the high rocks on the harbour's sides, we could hardly tell sea from land. Sheltered from the wind, the water had become as smooth as an untarnished mirror, and in spite of all the caution with which we dipped and raised the oars, a splash every now and then could not be avoided. And over such a surface sound travels far in the quiet of night.

Presently the voices of two men talking came to us across the water, and after a minute or so one of them challanged.

- "Who goes there?"
- " Amigos, Españoles," replied Willie Trehalion.
- "Mother of God, those accursed English!" exclaimed the man on shore, and fired his pistol. We

smothered a laugh at the poorness of our boatswain's Spanish, and as further caution was now useless bent to our oars with a will.

"There's a fort of some sort here," shouted Alec, "between me and the shore. Follow in quickly before they can bring their guns to bear."

Hardly had the words left his lips when there was a flash and a roar, and a dose of lead took the tips from our starboard oars.

"Very prettily aimed!" muttered Jan Pengony, who as gunner must needs express his opinion; "the next may be closer. A demi-culverin, too, by the ring o't. Jump her along, lads, and let's be after the cap'n afore he's stormed the place by hisself. Hooray for Cap'n Ireland and the Scourge."

And so lustily did our fellows lay their backs to the work, that before another thirty seconds had passed, the boat sprang almost high and dry on the shore, and the next shot from the demi-culverin whistled safely over our heads.

"Now, lads," I shouted, "up we go, and at 'em axe and hanger! But mind not to fall foul of our own men, for the night's as dark as the pit. Stay a moment! There's the captain clamouring for admittance on the right yonder! We'll try if we can't scramble in at the sea face."

So saying, I turned and cut across the rocks to the left, with the men after me, helter-skelter. The fools of Spaniards were still blazing away with cannon and arquebus overhead, showing us what a state of confusion they were in; and till I had actually squeezed my big carcase in through an embrasure no one offered to stop me. And after that, though many had the will, none had the power to cut me down.

Breech to breech with the very demi-culverin that had first been fired at us, I held the ground till the others picked their way through the darkness and clambered up. Then, yelling to tell Alec our whereabouts, we charged together, driving the dons before us with a tempest of hacks and hews that, dazed and half awake as they were, they had no stomach to stand against; and finally pinned a big crowd of them against a corner of the palisading.

But in spite of the success of our first charge, we were very nearly overpowered; for others kept flocking out of the barrack as the din waked them from their sleep, and, taking us between two fires, were likely to have made a small mouthful of us by sheer weight of numbers. Rapidly falling into a small hollow square, we fought for awhile for our very lives, with a grinning circle of yellow Spanish teeth ravening at us on every side.

Then suddenly there was a cry of alarm from the great fort, and about half of our assailants ran off to defend that point. The hearty English cheer with which they were received told us that Alec and his lads had got in at last.

This was the turning point. A few more Spanish heads were broken before we succeeded in joining our two bands; but when that was once effected the combat was of short duration; for shouting, after

our usual custom, that we'd slaughter every soul unless they threw down their arms at once, we rushed them all into two opposite corners, and held them so till every weapon was out of their hands.

"Jack, take a couple of men with you, and go and examine the barrack," cried Alec.

I did as he bade me, and returned presently to report that there was a large room in which we could hold the prisoners safe in the meantime. We gaoled them all safely therefore, with the exception of the commandant, in their own quarters, and, after setting guards at the door, cast about what was to be done next.

Alec questioned the commandant.

"How many men have you here?"

"Some hundred and eighty, Senor, and had I known how small your handful was I would never have surrendered to you. However, in the town——"

"I have no time for parleying, Senor Commandant," said Alec shortly, "and if your townsfolk annoy us I'll batter the place down about their ears. But give me what I want and I promise that my advantage shall not be pressed further. I must have powder and pearls; your whole stock of each."

"Your request is a modest one, Senor Englishman. You ask for all we have got!"

"And, asking, intend to have. Recognise, Senor, that might is right just now, and so save further bloodshed."

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders. "The powder I cannot prevent you from taking," said

he. "You will find it, or at any rate the greater part of it, in the magazine underneath the penthouse there. But the pearls, fortunately, are out of my keeping. They are stored in the Treasury, and that lies in the very heart of the town."

"Very well, Senor, to the heart of the town I go for them, and with you as my guide."

"Senor Captain," said the commandant, indignantly, "consider my rank!"

"That is precisely what I am doing," replied Alec, drily enough. "You enjoy at present the rank of prisoner to Alexander Ireland, who will hold your body responsible for any ambush your tongue may lead him into."

"And now lads," he continued, turning away from the Spaniard, "there's dawn beginning to show over the hill, and so the less time we waste the better. Carry the powder down to the boats, and when it's safely stowed, tell the boat-keepers to shove off a couple of oars' lengths from the shore. Armourer, spike all those culverins but one, break the pans and stocks from the arquebuses, and cut the crossbow strings. Willie Trehalion, I leave you here with four men to guard the barrack door. Slew that culverin round, and fire mumchance into the brown of them if they get restive; and if that does not silence them, post your men on either side of the door, and baptise with your axes all those who try to come out. You understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the boatswain, grimly.

"The rest of you, form fours, and follow me as

hard as you can run. Senor Commandant—after you! And, Senor, no attempts at escape, if you value your life. I'm fleet of foot, and my sword-blade will split you in the back at the least sign of treachery."

Out we went at a good, smart trot—the don, in his shirt, leading—and speeding along a muddy, well-used path, bore towards the town. It was not a very large place, so far as we could see, and there were no defences, as the fort above could from its position have sunk any vessel that attempted to enter the upper harbour. But the inhabitants had been thoroughly aroused by the firing, and now flocked out of every alley, armed and resolute, to defend their houses. A spattering fire greeted our approach, but it touched no one, and only changed the more orderly advance into a mere race for precedence.

Alec was amongst the first knot, when I was puffing and blowing full twenty fathoms astern; and his rashness very nearly led him into trouble, for one big fellow leaped on him from behind, and had him on the ground before he could shake off the embrace. However, Job Trehalion's lean, long legs brought him on to the scene in time, and Alec's captor rolled over with a head split to the chin.

By the time our captain had got on his legs again the rest of us had come up, and together we drove the townsfolk down their street in a body, shouting that we'd fire the houses if they made us halt. The Spanish commandant had contrived to bolt when Alec's hands were full during the first mêlée, and so we pushed on without a guide, trusting that instinct would lead us to where the pearls were stored. For, in truth, some of us had keen noses for plunder.

As it turned out, we made two false searches, taking the trouble to overhaul a couple of stone buildings which were only food stores and dwelling-places. Indeed we were very nearly done out of the booty altogether, for the Spaniards made a clever and desperate attempt to carry off the pearls to a safer spot.

In the event, however, this effort of theirs gave us the very information we needed. We spied a knot of fellows laden with leather pouches, trying to slink away in the confusion, and, knowing that at a critical moment no man troubles himself with burdens unless they are of unusual value, we made after them.

On being pursued they dropped their loads, which we promptly gathered up, every man slinging two of the pouches to his belt; and then, going to the building from which we had seen the fellows come, we broke down the door and fought our way in.

There was a strong defence, but it was carried at some cost—to the defenders—and we helped ourselves to another score of the leather bags, and came out again. The fight was waxing furious outside, and reinforcements were coming up every minute.

"We must get out of this," cried Alec, as a furious rush drove us back against the wall of the treasure-houses. "Hack and thrust, lads; clear a space and

form fours again. Drop the pearls if they're too heavy to hold. We must reach the fort and relieve the boatswain."

"The soldiers is got out," bawled a voice. "It's them that's at us now."

"There's the commandant! 'Ware sword behind, Master Topp!"

"Down the street to the right, lads," sung out Alec, "and make for the shore. The boats are coming to meet us."

"Ay, an' uncle's in 'em," added Job Trehalion with a chuckle. "They Spaniards in the barrack's been too many for him."

When they saw our object the Spaniards, led on by their commandant, pressed us harder and harder, and encumbered as most of us were by the leather bags—for the men held grimly on to their precious pearls—we were very nearly overcome. But the narrowness of the street was in our favour, and with Alec and Jan Pengony and myself covering the retreat, we got slowly down to the beach. Even then our work was not over, for the boats, having had to make a long circuit to avoid a reef, were still a considerable distance away, and the Spaniards, no longer fearing to hit friends, opened a galling arquebus fire.

Alec, however, was equal to the occasion. Calling upon us to drop the pearl bags by the water's edge and follow him, he dashed back against the assailants with the whole crew of us at his heels, and before they quite knew what had happened, we had

taken prisoners the commandant and three of the other leaders, as well as about a dozen of the rabble. These formed a breastwork which sheltered us completely from their friends' fire, and so no further attack was made until the boats came round.

There were some symptoms of a final rush, as, after heaving the precious pouches on to the floor-boards, we prepared to embark ourselves; but at the first forward movement we swore that we would slit the throats of our prisoners if we were molested.

The threat was enough; they let us slip off in peace; and as soon as we were out of gun and bow-shot, we tipped our hostages into the water and let them swim back unmolested.

Without further incident the boats rowed down the harbour and steered up alongside the *Scourge*, which had drifted in on the current, and was lying scarcely a quarter of a mile off the land. We got under weigh at once, and congratulated ourselves on our good luck.

Powder for our cannon, and pearls for our purses—it was a good night's work.

CHAPTER XXII

PATRIOTISM IS ELBOWED ASIDE BY PLUNDER

"WELL, boatswain," said Alec, when the forestaysail sheet had been let draw and we were once more comfortably under weigh, "tell us how it was you let those Spaniards escape from the barrack."

"Sneakin' hounds!" growled Willie, who was not over well-pleased with himself. "They put shame on an honest seaman. You'd hardly left the building when the dirty scoundrels came helter-skelter at us, all fully armed, forcing us to fire the culverin, and then to fight for dear life. Where they got the arms from the Lord only knows, an' I hadn't time to find out. An' whilst one party o' the skunks was keeping us going in front, another was grubbing away at the wall in the rear, so that before we rightly knew what the trouble was, they'd made a hole, an' most of them was through it and after you. An' then, cap'n, when the birds was flown, what could a four like us do? We'd cut down a baker's dozen of them, but we wasn't able to run after and bring back the rest. So, judging that they'd make for the town, we nailed up the touch-hole of that last culverin, an' then slipping down to the boats, rowed off to the lower beach to meet you."

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"And well you did so," replied Alec, "for we have got off with none killed, which at one time I little thought we would do."

"None killed," I added, "but several scratched pretty deep and three badly wounded. George has got a crack on the sconce which I fear will stop his fighting for ever. His helmet was slit through, as though it had been a paper fool's-cap."

"Don't you bother about Garge, Master Topp," sang out Jan Pengony from the forescuttle. "Garge's skull's like a bullock's. Now that the Old Man's pulled the broken sword-blade out on't, an' sewed up the slit, Garge is cursing away as amiable as ever he did."

"Is the Old Man surgeoning, then?"

"Aye, an' lacking a better we might have a worse. He's just chopped off Tinker Tom's leg at the knee-joint, an' seared up the stump as neat as can be. An' Tom, he never uttered a groan nor a grunt the whole time, an' there he is now a-clamouring to have his leg salted down to take home with him for a keepsake. I'm thinking the Old Man bain't no bad surgeon."

And so it proved, for, with the exception of the loss of Tinker Tom's leg, every man of the crew was as sound ten days after the fight as he had been when the Scourge's powder-room was empty. The taking of this store of powder and pearls at El Pueblo del Norte was in every way a lucky stroke, for, besides giving us the means for future battles, it put all hands in conceit with their captain and their

craft. Moreover, it was something prosperous to look back upon during the profitless time that followed.

After clearing the reefs of the harbour, we ran round to patrol the well-used highway at the back of the island, lying behind the rocky shelter of Coche, which is separated from Margherita by a strait two leagues in width, and darting out when a quarry appeared. Six times in six weeks we were engaged, but the prey was after Alec's heart, not mine. We grievously annoyed the subjects of that most Catholic king his Majesty of Spain; but all that we rifled from their pockets would not have melted down into a deep-sea lead.

The explanation is simple. Each craft we brought to and overhauled was westward bound, carrying a packed cargo of lank, lean dons from the Old World to fill their pauper pockets from the wealth of the New. Quite one half of each barque's sallow company was rotten with scurvy, a result of the long passage out; and as sick men who have no wealth but the ragged clothes on their backs to defend will not fight desperately for the fortunes they have yet to gain, none of these encounters cost one drop of English blood. Indeed, five ships out of the six hove-to at the first shot and surrendered without further resistance.

Now, though I know that it goes against an English seaman's grain to resort to extreme measures in cold blood, still Prudence is a jade that needs attention as well as the more highly-mettled steed Chivalry; and so I, and almost all the Scourge's

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crew with me, saw fit to expostulate with our captain on his treatment of the prisoners. Their vessels, as he had no use for them, he scuttled, but their bodies he consigned to the boats, and allowed them to make for the shore unmolested. Nor would he allow a hair of one of them to be injured.

It was in vain that we warned him that some, escaping fevers and hunger, wild beasts and heathen, must make their way to the Spanish settlements, and giving news of our cruising ground either bring the hawks down upon us or, what was just as bad, prevent the herons from crossing our flight. It was equally in vain that we showed him how every Spaniard allowed to go free—for that nation knows not gratitude—meant one more pair of hands against us or our countrymen at some future day. He would listen to nothing. His duty, he said, was to war against Spain. His conscience was satisfied that by destroying her shipping he wounded her mortally, but his conscience would never consent to killing men other than in fair fight.

On deck I was loyal to my captain, as was my duty, but in the cabin I spoke my thoughts freely, as was a sworn shipmate's privilege.

"The crew is getting surly," I told him one day, "with this long-continued ill-success, and it will take little to make their muffled grumblings break out into open mutiny."

"What will they have?" he answered, impatiently.

"But sailors are the same all the world over. I make not the slightest doubt that Shem, Ham, and

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Japhet growled among themselves on deck whenever "Captain" Noah was in his state cabin. But let our lads say what they want, and I am ready to listen. It is not as if they were hired for a set trading voyage to a certain port and back again, with thumb-marks and crosses duly set against an agreement, and bounty-money pocketed and guzzled before the anchor was tripped. I am their captain only by election, and hence to a certain degree their servant."

- "How if they depose you?"
- "Then I shall serve under the new captain. Who is it to be? Yourself?"
- "You know me better than to think that," said I, warmly.
 - "Yes, Jack, I do. But who else is there?"
 - " Willie Trehalion."
- "Willie Trehalion would never take the crossstaff from my hands. Besides, he doesn't know how to use it. But what about the Old Man? He has the ear of many of the crew, and from what I hear was a shipmaster before he fell into the hands of the Inquisition."

"I can well believe that," said I. "It was only the other day he took the cross-staff in those twisted fingers of his, shot the sun, ciphered out his reckoning on the slate, and turning round, 'Oh, ho, ho! Master Topp,' he chuckled, 'he's a lubberly navigator who cannot find his position to a matter of three minutes.' And then when I had gone over the work afresh and found that he seemed to be right,

'Ah, ha, ha! Master Topp, you're a better scholar with cudgel than with pencil. More weight in the forearm than in the head, eh? Stick to the sea long enough, and you'll blunder a stout ship ashore yet before you're hanged.' And he would have added more in the same strain but I didn't wait to hear it."

"Ah," laughed Alec, "the Old Man's infirmities protect his skin from the trouncing of John Topp's fist, and the Old Man's wit is too sharp-pointed to take a trouncing from John Topp's tongue."

"Maybe," said I, sulkily, "but I have no fancy to be taught by a daft man."

"Why not, if he knows something which you don't? Put your pride in the powder-room, Jack, along with the other touchy explosives, and remember that every man on this earth has something to teach. At least, so I have found. The mummer chap from Stratford says that there are sermons in stocks and stones, and good in everything."

"Where's the good in a Spaniard?" I asked slyly.

"To till land and build towns for her Majesty's lieges sometime to occupy, and for the present to gather gold for you to plunder."

"Right!" said I. "Then let us set about the plundering. I tell you this profitless cruise must cease, or there'll be powder burning within the walls of the fortress. The men's sulks will come to a head shortly, if you don't give them a sop to their greed."

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Alexander Ireland got up and paced the cabin, plucking at his short red beard in irritation.

"The devil seize you all for a set of unhung robbers!" he cried passionately. "Not one of you has a spark of true patriotism in him. From this spot I have destroyed vessel after vessel of the enemy, and without losing a single man. And why? Because their crews have nothing to fight for. But intercept a rich plate ship, and in one fight we may lose half our ship's company; and then it will be 'Hurrah! for England, whilst yet the Scourge has men enough to sail her there.' Well, so be it! As my hounds will not hunt dry-scented any longer, I must flesh them."

"You speak confidently," said I, half scared at his vehemence, "as though you could point out the course of a fat prize without further search."

"And so I can," he answered quietly, and unrolling a chart of the Main, skewered it on to the table. "See here! The vessels coming empty from the east touch no land before reaching here, and so make for this strait in happy ignorance of our presence. Not so those that are full of treasure and homeward bound. Every port on the coast has been advertised of the pestilential Englishman's whereabouts, so they steer a point or two to the northward of the regular course, and pass by the other side of Margherita, near that same El Pueblo del Norte which we harried three months ago. Now, if we creep round the eastern end of the island, I warrant we'll be within gun-shot of some hulking gold-waggon before we're a couple of Sundays older."

"Then," said I, "in the name of all that's sensible, do it!"

The captain laughed shortly. "No, I'll leave the matter in your hands, Jack. If you and the other rascals are so greedy for gold, you can put the Scourge about whenever you please. And I—I'll fight her for you down to the last plank when the time comes."

Without another word I sprang up the ladder.

The men were idling about the hot decks in surly knots of threes and fours; but the news brightened up their sullen faces as rain does a parched prairie. They jumped to their stations like a parcel of holiday schoolboys. Up went the stowed foresail; the headsails sprang aloft like larks; and, driven by eager arms, the windlass heaved us up to the stream anchor at which we were riding.

"Flatten in the starboard jib-sheet there, and cant her head off. Handsomely, now! There she comes round, the beauty! Forrad there; let draw and sheet home. Now, helmsman, set her head N.N.E. and by N., and keep her so till we are clear of the island."

A good whole-sail breeze was coming from the E. by S., which tempered the sun's brazen rays to a pleasant warmth, and sent us sweeping along through the smooth Caribbean Sea on one of our best points of sailing; the hands were in high good humour at the thought of a full-fleshed prize; a cask of rich Alicante had been brought on deck and broached; and thus with most cheerful augury we began our new quest.

Patriotism might wait; it was Plunder's turn now.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PLATE SHIP

A S long as we were within sight of Margherita we held on as though making for some of the Windward group; for we knew that there would be watchers on the cliffs, to say nothing of the pearl fishers in their canoes, who would at once spread the news of our neighbourhood, and so spoil our chance of making a capture, unless we could manage to baffle them. But when the highest peaks of the islands were just visible as dots on the horizon from our mastheads, we hauled our wind and began making short boards under easy canvas to north and south By this means we kept our position, alternately. as far as possible, unchanged, just out of sight of Margherita, and trusted that the gold-hunger of our lookout would let nothing of value escape us on the road to Spain.

For fifteen long days did we patrol the seas on narrow sentry-go without sighting a sail. On one night a mermaiden was reported by Job Trehalion, as having sung to him as he hung over the tiller; and he told us, with a shamefaced chuckle, that it must have been the comeliness of his features which attracted her. Another afternoon we hauled a

monster shark aboard and ate him, with the greater relish when we remembered that he would doubtless have done the same by us had the tables been turned.

On the fifteenth night we watched, with no little uneasiness, a pale flickering flame passing along the waters in coiling curves some two leagues off towards The knowing ones said it was the the N.N.W. breath of the great sea serpent prowling in search of prey, and would have tried to scare it away with a shot from our big gun, had not Alec flatly forbidden it. Now, though at the time I thought this veto of his ill-judged and foolhardy, as tending to make the men careless in guarding against the common dangers of the deep, yet, as the issue showed, it was the luckiest thing for us that the men did not have their way, for, had the noise of firing gone abroad just then, the reward of our patient search would have slipped away ere we could pluck it, and we should never have known the rich prize we had lost.

Scarcely had the last flicker of the sea serpent's trail died into the night, when Job Trehalion, who, as the keenest-sighted man on board, was jockeying the fore cross-tree, hailed that another light was shining out now.

- "What kind of light?" cried Alec.
- "A clear steady glow, sir, though it bain't bigger than a pea."
 - "Where away?"
 - "Down to loo'ard. Square a-beam."

At the welcome news we slacked out our sheets

put the helm up, and ran off before the wind to see what manner of company that light promised us.

When we had run half a league, Job sang out that there were three lights now, and that he could make out that they were the poop lanterns of a large ship hove to end on to us.

In an instant all was preparation. Our numbers were small, but the thirty-two men who assembled, without needing a drum to beat them to quarters, were tough as whipcord and wiry as game cocks. There were no 'prentice hands to hinder matters by overwilling scurry and bustle; nor were there any cowards who would duck to flying bullets. Each man knew his place and his work and went to it. Guns were cast loose and loaded, pikes unlashed from the booms, axes and small-arms taken from their racks, lintstock tubs arranged along the decks, the powder-room thrown open and everything cleared for action. Yet all this was done with the greatest quietness, so that if possible we might creep up within range of the enemy undiscovered.

The night was dark and suited our purpose well. The Scourge's course was down the wake of the few rays of moonlight that crept through the crannied clouds; but the side of her cloths which faced the Spaniard was shrouded in heavy shadow. The galleon, on the other hand, was plainly visible to the eager eyes which peered over our bulwarks. She was hove-to—as is the cautious habit of the dons during even the finest night—and her heavy bow now threshed down into the swell, and now shot off

a cataract of foaming water as the beak rose again into the salt-laden air. She was riding very dead, and many were the congratulatory rib nudges when the men saw how low she lay in the water.

"An eight hundred ton galleon," rumbled out Willie Trehalion in a growling whisper. "Eight hundred ton, never a one less, if my eye ha'n't lost its trick o' measuring; an' laden that deeply, her waist's 'most flush wi' the wavetops. There'll be tidy pickings behind these stout ribs o' hers, very tidy pickings."

"Oh, ho!" chuckled the Old Man softly. "Counting the moidores and forgetting the caballeros that guard them! Smacking your lips over the tidy pickings, like my burly Jack here, whose soul thirsts after plunder more than his belly does after drink. But, Boatswain Willie and Lieutenant Jack, there's going to be a bloody fight first, eh?"

"Ah, ha! It's a blissfully gruesome time I see ahead for the galleon yonder. Sleek sides hacked through and through with shot, carvings splintered, and gildings blackened; her pinions plucked, her fabric dismantled; and her scuppers will bleed till the sea around glows like an autumn sunset. Oh, ho! Captain Ireland, you're like to choke our good friends the sharks with very surfeit, before this world is a night and a day older. Think of it! Scarce a shot will leave your guns that does not dull its speed on human flesh. That galleon has not spare housing room for a fly. She's crammed with men, close as peas in a pod. Soldiers and servants,

passengers and cooks, mariners and officers, there should be nearly six hundred pairs of ears aboard her. Saints! what a merry conceit it would be to shred off those same ears, and carry 'em home like a string of dried figs, as a present to her Most Gracious Majesty! What say you, Jack Topp, shall we do it?"

I was about to make a sharp answer, for the old dotard's savagery sickened me, when Alec sternly called for silence, for fear that our voices should give the alarm. And so I held my tongue, and the Old Man subsided into smothered gurglings.

Save for the creaking of the gear and the gentle splash of the water against the bends, we crept along as quietly as a craft full of spectres. But the noises inseparable from the working of a vessel, or else the smell of danger in the air (which they say a Spaniard is specially quick to scent), at length stirred the drowsy sentinels to their duty, and presently the noise of great confusion came to us over the water.

On board the Spaniard terror and tremulous preparation were everywhere. The portholes opened, and brass cannon grinned through them and gleamed evilly in the moonlight. A swarm of battle-lanterns flew aloft and perched like fireflies in the rigging.

An attempt was made to get the galleon under weigh, so that she might answer her helm and thus be easier to fight. But her people were a mere disorganised mob, each trying to be useful, but entirely without order or discipline; and so, crowded as they were, they succeeded best in get-

ting into each other's way. Some flew to the sheets and braces, some merely hurried about bawling orders and directions to whoever would listen, and some loaded ordnance and small arms with frantic haste.

These last, as soon as the charges were rammed home, fired; bow chaser, stern chaser, and broadside pieces were fired as fast as the gunners could load them, but as they did not trouble themselves to take any special aim, the volleys may perhaps have disturbed the fishes, but from us, the enemy, they drew not groans but grins.

There the great galleon lay helpless like some wooden island, spitting innocuous fire from every point. But the little *Scourge* drew on under perfect command and in perfect silence.

When we were almost aboard of the enemy Alec put down his helm, and running across her bows poured in a heavy raking fire as each gun bore, and then getting before the wind again, came back under her stern and repeated the dose from the same pieces. Whilst they were still lying helplessly head to wind he went about once more, and sending his starboard broadside into her poop windows as he shot past, ran away to northward and engaged at long range.

Hitherto, save for a few shot holes in the sails, a trailing rope or two, and here and there a white jagged splinter, we had suffered nothing. But Alec had noted that the don's fire was steadying down as discipline began to assert itself, and knowing that

one well-aimed broadside must either dismantle or sink us, he remembered that in a fight against heavy odds brains, and not brute force, should be the watchword. So, confident in the powers of his long gun, he sheered off to a distance, and began pelting the Spaniard with single shots as fast as the piece could be loaded.

The don, on his part, after a quarter of an hour's furious cannonade, grew tired of firing at a mark which was obviously beyond the range of his guns, and, setting his sail-trimmers to work, got the galleon on the larboard tack. She was headed for Margherita, and it was plain to us that she intended to run for shelter under the batteries of El Pueblo del Norte.

Now, such a project by no means suited our ideas, and so we redoubled our efforts with the long gun, hoping to carry away some spar that would disable her. But though Jan Pengony could plump a shot into the hull every time he clapped his lintstock to the priming, there was not a gunner amongst us able to dent either mast or rigging. And so flattening in our sheets once more, we made after her, close-hauled, and ranging up to windward tried another plan

By one of Fate's revenges these Spaniards were hoist by their own mine. For, on the Old Man's advice, we crammed each gun to the muzzle with the very leg-shackles and wrist-cuffs that had chained some of us to a galley's bank, and taking the quoins from the gun-carriages, let fly a cloud of Inquisi-

torial engines that brought everything down by the run about their ears. Fetters were never put to finer use.

A cheer went up as we saw the galleon, with foremast gone below the round top, mainyard cut through in the slings, and rigging all in hopeless bights, fall head to wind and lie an unmanageable hulk on the water.

But rejoicing came too soon. In answer to Alec's summons to surrender, a tall armoured figure sprang on the poop, and, hailing us with a menacing gesture, swore he'd fight the ship while two planks of her held together.

The cheer died on our lips. The armoured Spaniard was Don Miguel del Cassamoro.

CHAPTER XXIV

BLOOD FOR BOOTY

"HULLO!" cried Alec, somewhat taken aback at this unexpected meeting, "by all the devils in Spain, Don Miguel del Cassamoro in the flesh!"

"As you'll soon find to your cost, heretical searobber. You've overshot your mark this time, Senor Captain Ireland."

"Perhaps so," said Alec unconcernedly. "But pardon my surprise, senor; I hoped you were a ghost long ago. Too wicked to be drowned, eh?"

The Spaniard whipped out a venomous oath and yelled to his men to fire again. A heavy broadside crashed over our deck, too high, fortunately, to do much injury to the low-lying hull, but our long gun was dismantled and our bowsprit snapped off short just outside the gammoning.

Then, indeed, for awhile, the battle raged in grim, red earnest. With the forestay carried away we could do nothing but lie head to wind, parallel to our antagonist, until a fresh headsail was rigged. Had it been blowing fresh we might have had her round before the wind, and so run to a distance to

refit. But the firing had flattened down the light breeze almost to a dead calm, so we had perforce to stay where we were.

In a strait like this we had counted upon being able to row the Scourge out of danger, as we had already rowed her up alongside a prize in a calm; but now, as fortune would have it, an unlucky round-shot entering in at an open port had hit the six sweeps as they lay lashed on the deck, and had broken every one of them into two. And so, with the decks becoming more of a shambles every minute, we stood our ground, and fought the guns like furies; and though our pieces were outnumbered by more than two to one, we hoped by serving them twice as quickly to return as good or even better than we got. Besides, every shot of ours found a billet somewhere in the Spaniard's hull, while many of his, through the greater elevation of his guns, flew harmlessly over the little Scourge. Had it been otherwise we could never have hoped to keep her afloat.

The calm flattened down still further, till the sea became like a lake of oil, motionless save for the sullen rolling of the swell, and in some mysterious manner—by the arms of the mermen, maybe—the two vessels were slowly being drawn together.

Fortune favoured the Scourge; the galleon's head fell off slightly towards the south, and her broadside guns, by reason of the narrowness of their ports, could not be brought to bear. We devoted all our energies, therefore, to silencing her stern-chasers, to

playing havoc amongst her poop lanterns, carved stern galleries, and rudder, and to making the after part of the vessel a hell too hot for even Spaniards to defend.

Whilst we were still a cable's length from the enemy's stern a strange thing happened. A sailor ran on to the poop, leaped overboard, and swam as though for his life towards us. Spanish shot pitted the water round him like thunder drops in a pond, but as he held up his hand as if appealing to us for assistance, we engaged his assailants, and made them think rather of their own skins.

The swimmer meanwhile came up alongside, and getting his fingers into the main chains, quickly scrambled on board. Though vastly changed by the hardships of warfare and captivity, we recognised him as Saul Dickory, one of the *Bristol Merchant's* crew; and hot though the fight raged around us, we snatched a moment to press the hand of a comrade of the old days.

He had, so he said, been serving in Spanish ships ever since his capture at the mountain ravine, leading a dog's life while doing two men's work, and until now had never seen a chance of escape. Further, he had an offer to make us. Give him a light line and he'd jump overboard again and make it fast to a ring-bolt on the don's stern, and then we might warp ourselves up and board through the cabin window.

"But for the love of heaven," he implored us, "keep the Spanish sharpshooters busy while I swim.

I can hear the splash of their bullets round my ears now."

Alec, however, refused to allow him to make this attempt for fear of the sharks, observing that we should be able to do as much for ourselves with the grappling iron in half an hour's time at our present rate of drifting. "But," he added, "I am afraid that Don Miguel has still too many men for my small handful to tackle."

"Aye, captain," replied Dickory, that he has! There are nigher three hundred than two hundred aboard you galleon who can still hit a good heavy blow, though there's near as many besides wi' their toes turned up. But once get inside the big cabin, and you can clear it and hold it agin the lot of 'em."

"But I want the whole ship, sirrah."

Saul Dickory shook his head. "You can't do it, captain," he declared decidedly. "An' if you try, the big waves will be rolling over every man of us to-morrow. But you can do what's as good—you can lay your hands on the store of dollars."

"Without taking the ship? How?"

"The hatch of the treasury is in the cabin floor, an' you can strike out the cargo into this queer craft o' yourn without a blessed don of 'em being able to stop you."

And this in the end was what we did. The mermen, or Neptune, or the current, or whatever agency had charge of our keels, swept the two vessels nearer and nearer together, till at last a couple of cleverly thrown grapples caught hold,

and our bulwark ground against the galleon's square stern.

Her crew had no intention of letting us set foot in their stronghold without a tussle, and did what they could with fire-balls and grenadoes, cold shot and naked steel, to stop us. But with a ladder of boarding-axes driven into their timbers, we scrambled up, and soon had a footing in the cabin.

Hemmed in by the packed masses behind, the front rank had the alternative of fight or fall. They fought, long and desperately—and then they fell; for they expected no quarter and asked none. We on our side fought as furiously as they, stabbing with shortened weapons where there was no room to swing them, and thrusting many a foe through the open portholes into the sea. It was a bloody conflict; for not until two-thirds of the cabin's defenders lay dead and dying did the Spaniards suffer themselves to be driven out into the waist.

We ourselves had lost Jan Pengony, his friend George, and three others killed outright, and two more were so sorely wounded that they died there on the cabin floor. Scarce one of us but had his red gash to show.

But it was no time to groan or lick our wounds. The two doors under the poop were closed and barred with furniture piled up against them, loaded patareroes were thrust through the loop-holes to command the waist, and the hatch of the treasure room was cleared of bodies and thrown open. The pieces of eight we found snugly stowed in oak

chests, and while half-a-dozen of us stood ready by the swivel gun, the rest made all haste they could to hand up the treasure and lower it through the windows on to the *Scourge's* deck below.

But rapid as were our movements, Don Miguel had no notion of allowing us to spoil his ship unmolested.

Scarcely had we got into the swing of work than he and a strong party with him mounted the poop again, and commenced annoying the little craft whose bulwarks were grinding against his stern far below. They hurled down everything weighty and unpleasant that came to hand, and finally they dropped a barrel of powder, which on bursting scorched several of our lads so severely that they cried out to us in the galleon's cabin that the deck was too hot to hold any longer.

At this Alec, leaving me in charge of the cabin, returned to his own vessel, and hailed the poop above.

"Don Miguel, ahoy!"

The tall Spaniard appeared above, gritting his yellow teeth with rage.

"Don Miguel, if you do not cease from annoying my people you shall have something else to think about. I swear to you that if you do not permit me to finish my task unmolested I'll sweep your crowded waist with a hurricane of patareroe balls; and that the survivors may not want employment to keep them out of mischief, I'll fire your galleon's hold before I leave her. There's a keg of spirits under the table that will help her to burn."

"And if I permit you to carry off your robber's booty in peace?"

"Measure your words, Don Miguel! If you permit me to carry off my lawful prize-"

The Spaniard interrupted with a harsh laugh of impotent rage.

"—— my lawful prize, I say, taken from my country's enemy," went on Alec, calmly; "and if you offer no further annoyance to my men, I, on my part, faithfully promise to do you and yours no further injury for the present. Fortune will, I hope, grant us another meeting on some future day, when accounts may be settled. Meanwhile, senor, your answer is awaited."

Don Miguel, who seemed almost beside himself with suppressed fury, was evidently about to hurl a defiance at us, and raised his hand to clinch his refusal with a pistol bullet. But his officers and underlings had had a bellyful of fighting. Though each might have a stake in the golden cargo below. each remembered that with another throw of the dice he would lose not only that, but life as well. And choosing like wise men the lesser of the two evils, they laid violent hands on their reckless commandant, and dragged him down. Then one of them iumped up into his place, and signified that they agreed to the armistice. They promised, he said, not to molest us further, and they looked to us to keep a like faith with them. With a ringing cheer our lads set to work again on the gold chests; but none the less, we kept the swivel gun trained on the

crowd in the galleon's waist. For he is a besotted fool who trusts a penny's-worth to a Spaniard's word.

They dared not break faith with us, however—because of the gun; and so we were able to tranship the golden harvest without further loss of life.

Whilst the party in the galleon's cabin bustled merrily amongst the booty, another party refitted our damaged headsails; and when the last chest of gold pieces had been dumped upon our deck, we raised an ironical cheer for the wealth of golden Spain, and as the rising breeze bellied her sails, the little *Scourge* sheered slowly off from her whipped and sullen adversary.

Aye, we were victorious; and while the red blood still flowed from our wounds we recked little of the heavy price we had paid. But when the mad frenzy of fighting is over, gaping cuts tingle and grow stiff; and then it is that men begin to count the cost, and spare a thought for those who have fallen, comrades who were alive and full of hope a few short hours before. We had a dreary account-taking. It was clear that the *Scourge* could no longer hold her own in these seas of the New World.

CHAPTER XXV

THE COST OF THE GOLD

THE galleon's gold had cost us very dear. Out of our slender ship's company thirteen had been killed outright, four had hurts that they would die under, and of the rest there was no man who could not show the colour of his own blood.

When the excitement of the battle had passed away and the grim fever of slaying had become a memory, not one stood on our decks in whose body there was not some deadly throb or sickening ache. Not one who was not stiff from angry, rainbow-coloured bruises, or faint from loss of blood. Our captain lay pale and helpless in his bunk, brought to death's very door by a bullet wound under the shoulder, which he had borne undressed through half the long fight. The back of the boatswain's bald pate was burned black with powder, and he had more ribs stove in than the pain would let him count. And of the others, one ailed this, and another that; one by the blow of an axe had lost the fingers of his hand, another by the crack of a gun-stock had lost the sense of his head.

The active watch on deck consisted of two persons. There was Job Trehalion, with the old scar on his

face crossed by a fresher seam, and John Topp, with a pike thrust through the calf of one leg and a dagger wound in the foot of the other.

The Scourge was heading E.N.E., close-hauled. The wind had sprung up again, and a short, choppy sea kept the raffle of fragments constantly shifting about the littered decks. The guns were roughly secured, but nothing had been done to obliterate the marks of the action. Dark bloodstains fouled the deck-planks. Bulwarks, masts and booms were splintered in a hundred places. Powder-tubs, pikes, ramrods, a couple of helmets, and a half-burned canvas bucket lay littered about in undisturbed confusion. And, saddest sight of all, half-a-dozen silent forms were lying huddled amongst the débris.

There was one in the lee scuppers, that rolled with a stiff jerk from the broad of his back to a strained position on one side, every time the vessel gave a heavier lurch than usual. Another, with arms and legs stretched out like some uncouth starfish, was slipping slowly across the decks to meet him. On the weather side three other men lay, limp as the others were stiff. Their faces showed ghastly and deathlike in the dim moonlight. They watched the dead bodies with dull-eyed, hopeless fascination.

And as I looked at the three and at the two, it seemed to me that the gulf which separates the wounded quick from the wounded dead needs but the frailest bridge to span it.

We had remained in melancholy silence for I know not how long, when suddenly Job Trehalion got up without a word and went down the companion. Returning presently, he gave me a handful of biscuit and a lordly dram of cordial; and these being sent on their errand, revived me wonderfully. So, after adjusting the bloody bandages round my leg and instep, I told Job that he and I must lay our heads together and consider where to steer for.

Job was all chuckles and grins in a moment. It was not often that he was called into council by anyone save the Old Man. And him he affected to despise, and so he considered his confidences no compliment.

"One thing is sure," said I, looking at the battle havor round me, "we can't keep the seas in this plight."

"No, Master Topp," chuckled Job, "that we can't; let alone having no crew to reef or hand the sails, the hull an' spars has sich a'many wounds in 'em that the first good squall 'll send us all to Davy Jones's locker double quick. No, no; we'se winged, Master Topp, an' winged birds has to lie quiet for a while afore they tries to fly again."

"There should be abler heads than ours, Job, to settle matters in a plight like this; but the abler heads are all sadly battered just now, so you and I must do our best to decide a course without them."

A look of solemn importance struggled hard to drive the grin from Job's face. But habit was strong, and the grin conquered.

"We might go back to the old harbour on Cave Island, Master Topp. It were snug enough, an'

them huts on the hill above be a rare place for sick men to lie in."

"But the Spaniards, Job! You forget the Spaniards."

"Then do you forget the Spaniards, too, Master Topp. They bain't worth remembering," advised Job, cheerfully.

"But I'm afraid we've got to remember them," said I, sharply. "Why, man, in our present state we could neither keep them as slaves, nor coop them up in the cave. They'd turn the tables on us in half-an-hour, cut our throats or maroon us, and sail away with our dainty Scourge and all her precious freight. No, Job; you meant well, but the suggestion is not a good one."

"Asking pardon," replied Job, screwing up his face with such a grin that the wound across it began to trickle afresh, "but one o' they Spaniards that we left behind has got off. And if one, maybe all."

"What!" I cried. "One got off? Where did you hear of him?"

"See'd him, and felt him, Master Topp—which is better than hearing of him. It was his iron as wrote this fresh mark across my face. That comes o' disregarding the Old Man's words, an' sparing Spaniards," he added, sagely.

"Captain Ireland's whim, Job," said I, shrugging my shoulders. "But are you sure of your man?"

"Sure as I am of you, Master Topp, or of uncle, or of Cap'n Ireland, or of anyone else noticeable. This 'un was a short cheery kind o' little chap, wi'

bandy legs, an' a bright steel bassinet on 's head. Now, sea-armour is always blacked, so a man as wears his bright is nat'rally a man you notice."

"Why, I remember him!" said I. "A merry, cowardly little wretch named Sancho something or other; your uncle gave him a pretty scare in the Serpent's Temple."

"That's him; Don Sancho! An' if this blow he gave me had been driven home, 'stead o' falling half-hearted, through the frightened trembling o' the don's arm, I should ha' gone down sure enough. As it was, I stood an' toppled him into the sea for cumbering my way. Saul Dickory maybe could tell us how Bandy Legs came to be on the galleon."

"Fetch him," said I, and Job went.

If Job was right, and the Spaniards had really succeeded in leaving Cave Island, nothing could be more fortunate for us in our present crippled state. There we could recruit our war-weary bodies, and refit our wounded ship at our leisure; and when our pulses beat full and strong again we would be ready for another throw with Don Miguel, for I for one felt sure that we had by no means seen the last of that yellow-fanged grin of rage. But if our late slaves were still on the island, it would be madness to attempt the landing. Heaven grant they had escaped!

"Aye, said Saul Dickory, when I eagerly questioned him, "they've got off, sure enough. I've seed a-many of them, an' what's more, through them, I've heard all about your doings on the island."

"How did they get away?"

"Sighted a trading snow the day after you left, signalled her wi' a smoke from that 'ere Sarpint Hill I've heard tell of, an' got took off. The snow took them ashore at Barcelona. From there some of 'em took ship to Carthagena, where, as we was short-handed, they joined our galleon."

"Then," said I, cheerily, "our course is clear. We'll run to the old harbour to recruit and refit." And with the decision I felt more hopeful and lighthearted than I had since first my wounded leg began to tingle.

The Scourge was put about on the larboard tack, and after she had gained some southing she was gibed again, and headed directly for the island.

When we rounded the bluff at the harbour's mouth. and the foreshore in front of the cave opened out to our view, it was with anxious gaze that those of us who were hale enough to stand on deck, or to lean against mast or bulwark, scanned the beach and the heights above the cave for some sign of human habitation. The island was a pleasant enough spot to dwell in, and some of the Spaniards might have elected to stay and plant a colony there.

But not a trace of man did we see. Our old fortifications lay ruined and decayed, and in places the quick-growing tropical vegetation had almost hidden them from sight. The heavy door with which we had closed the cave's mouth lay half covered with sand, and the door-post from which it had once hung- had fallen slantwise across the

opening. No, there was nothing to fear. The island had returned to the possession of the pigs and the gulls and the parrakects—its original owners.

But though there was no opposing band to bar our progress, landing was none the less a matter of extreme difficulty. Few of the crew could move more than a step or two without bringing the deep furrows of pain across their brow, and some could not move at all. In the end more than half of our number had to be carried ashore on Job Trehalion's broad back, and when the journey was over, the burdens which Job laid gently down upon the warm sands in front of the cave were often unconscious ones; and, indeed, one poor fellow, whose lung had been pierced with a cross-bow shaft, died in the porterage.

To reach the huts on the high ground above was, for the most seriously wounded, an impossibility, and so we had to turn the cave itself into our hospital. We regretted this, because we had hoped much from the healing virtues of the flower-scented breeze of the uplands; but there was help for it.

"Ah, it was a time to make the greediest plunder-hunter sicken of his trade! The Angel of Death was ever hovering round us, and claiming now one good sailor and true comrade, and now another as part payment of the price of plunder. Not that we were a cheerless company, for the Old Man's caustic wit and Willie Trehalion's cumbersome attempts to reply to him raised many a smile from the weaker ones and many a loud guffaw from the stronger, and Job Trehalion's grin we had always with us.

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But the summons of death came all too often; and the tale of sandy mounds on the yellow harbour beach grew sadly long, in spite of all that the Old Man's skilful surgeoning and John Topp's tireless nursing could do to shorten it. All that man could do we did, but our enemy was too strong for us.

The end of our nursing came at last. Some conquered their wounds, and some their wounds conquered; and when the last grave had been dug and filled, there were but twelve men left out of the two-and-thirty who had been hale and strong when the fight for the galleon's gold began.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN OLD ENEMY

"TWELVE men on their legs," said the boatswain, waving his hook towards the huts, "an' that counts in the Old Man an' Tinker Tom, which is both crippled."

"Twelve men," said I, "are more than everyone would have got off the lee shore on which ten of them were lying."

"Credit is where credit is due, Master Topp," replied the boatswain. "All praise to your surgeoning. But for you, and the Old Man, an' Nevvy Job—which, though little better than natural in general, has unstowed a few grains o' sense for this time o' need—I don't say but we should ha' lost a hand or two more. But, as it is, we got twelve; an' what I say is, twelve men bain't able to take the Scourge to England."

"It could be done," interposed Alec in a half-musing tone, "if we could keep off the scurvy."

"But you can't," replied the boatswain gruffly. "Might as well try to escape fleas in a London tavern as scurvy on a long ocean voyage. And newly-healed men is particular liable to it. Mark me, Cap'n Ireland, if the Scourge sails from here wi'

none but us twelve aboard her, she'll never work up Bristol river."

- "But with the men Saul Dickory tells of," said I, "we could do it."
- "Could we get them?" inquired Alec, turning to the man.
- "Why, yes, cap'n, an' easy. Los Roques is the name of the islands they're on, an' you'll find that down in your charts. The chap as told me was a half-breed that got blown off there in a fishing cruise."
 - "How did they get there?"
- "Well, you see, they're a scratch lot—English, Frenchers, and Danes—that banded together at the mines to escape. They gets out, reaches the coast, seizes a boat, an' puts to sea. They meant to reach one of the islands, an' live there till they could steal a ship that would carry them home; but the boat was knocked to splinters in the surf on landing, an' having no tools to build another, they found themselves safely gaoled."
 - "Could we trust them, do you think?"
- "Maybe yes, maybe no; but they'll take any terms you like to offer 'em. There's not much victual in the island, barring fishy seafowl an' sichlike; an' if you'll believe me, they'd take passage wi' the devil himself if he came in these seas, an' didn't sail under a Spanish ensign."
- "See, Alec," said I, unrolling a chart and spreading it on the ground. "Give me a crew of six, and I'll take the Scourge round, leaving you others here.

By keeping plenty of northing we shall be out of the usual track, and can be back here in ten days without sighting a sail."

But no, Alec would not hear of it. If we went at all, it should be with all hands aboard, and himself in command; and finally, after much discussion, this was what we decided to do. Further it was resolved to leave the treasure on Cave Island for the present, and then, if any of the men we sent for seemed untrustworthy, we could keep quiet about our wealth until we had time to know the sheep from the goats.

The repairs to the *Scourge* were soon finished, and the earliest possible day was fixed for embarking.

But at the last moment an unexpected difficulty arose. The Old Man refused absolutely to quit the island. He had been ailing of late, and it seemed that he never quite recovered from the wound he got in the battle with the galleon. His wits were queerer than usual, and he continually complained of the cold, though the hot summer sun drew streams of sweat from the rest of us.

"Tis because I miss my weekly draught of torture," he would tell us. "The rack is a grand thing for cold weather and rheumatic joints. They strip you of your shirt and lay you between the pulleys, and the warmth that runs through your bones brings the perspiration starting at every pore. Oh, ho, ho! that pot-bellied little racker would wring his hands with grief if he could know how I miss his courteous attention at times."

It was a sudden freak of his, this wish to stay

behind on the island. Up to the last moment he had been rattling out his weird "Oh, ho's!" and cracking his gruesome jests; and then suddenly, in the midst of one of his most biting sallies, he broke off, and a wild glare came into his eyes. As though a ghost had called him, he rose from his favourite crouching attitude on the ground, and looking towards the great Temple of the Serpent, shaded his bleared eyes with a knotted hand, and gazed intently. What he saw no man can tell.

Anxiously I followed his gaze to see what it was that disturbed him; but there was nothing to be seen—nothing except the stern black edifice standing out cold and bleak against the blue sky beyond; nothing except the dwarfed sea-fowl swooping past it and the clouds fanning it with their clammy breath as they scurried by—nothing, that is, that I could see. But some vision there surely was which turned the Old Man's face ashen grey, some portent which made his speech-loving lips mumble noiseless words.

And when next he spoke, it was to acquaint us with his determination to stay on the island and guard the treasure till our return.

We all felt great concern for the Old Man, and though we knew he would never play us false, but would defend our treasure even with magic arts if need be, still we did not like to leave him behind, ailing as he was. But none of us dared to gainsay his wish except our captain. Fully an hour did Alec spend in useless argument, trying to turn him

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from his purpose, and seemed all the time to be strangely moved, though from what cause we could not tell. But he failed. And when at last the Scourge set sail, and the Old Man was left on the beach, my sworn shipmate covered him with his eyes till we had rounded the spit and run out of sight. Then, with a heavy sigh, he turned and went down to the cabin.

It was a strange affair, and perhaps we should have taken it as an omen of ill-luck. Though I am myself singularly free from superstitions of all kinds, I must believe that the Old Man had some fore-knowledge of misfortune to come; and yet I cannot think that he knew that the fire would break out in the Scourge's spirit-room, or surely he would have warned us. But, perhaps, as Willie Trehalion says, the seer can see, but cannot change the decrees of Fate. It may be so.

That, however, is neither here nor there. But the fact remains that a fire did break out, and that, too, on the second day out from Cave Island, during the first watch of the glass, whilst Alec held the deck.

I was in my bunk, but came up when the alarm was given, and was soon passing buckets with the rest. But the dainty Scowege was doomed, and our puny efforts were without avail. The water seemed only to irritate the blaze to further fury, and where at first was pale lambent flame, blue and transparent, soon there began to roll forth an avalanche of inky smoke riven by greedy shooting tongues of yellow fire.

Like furies we worked in the stinging reek, and, like a mocking fiend, our enemy grew in power and height. Inch by inch we were driven towards the stern, fighting desperately every step of the way. Spanish papist was never so relentless a foe as this one, which swallowed our watery missiles as fast as we hurled them, and turned them to hissing steam that bit back at the sender.

Panting and scorched, we gathered, a smokegrimed group, on the counter, and realised that we were beaten. A shout arose that the powder-room was on fire, and a half-charred boat was dropped into the water. Springing in, we pushed off.

Scarcely had we pulled a cable's length away when the Scourge blew up. Masts, spars, and deck shot up towards heaven, and then fell in a blazing shower around the column of smoke which marked the place where the shattered hull had sunk.

The rest of the night dragged itself wearily through, and the sun rose upon an unflecked sky. The boat was without stores or provisions of any kind. She had neither compass nor sail, and with one pair of oars we could make little headway through the calm, even had we known where to steer for.

Which of us did not envy the Old Man in his beautiful island hermitage, then?

We looked round at the unbroken circle of the horizon, with the water it encinctured untarnished by a single zephyr, and gleaming like a glancing mirror of light; then at the cruel sun that was arcing a course of scorching splendour through the cloudless vault above; and as we looked, we took but little comfort from the cheering words which Alec spoke to us. What help could reach us from such a barren, fiery wilderness? What oasis could we hope to find in such a broiling, trackless desert?

But in spite of the enervating heat we tugged doggedly at the oars. The work, purposeless as it seemed, was some relief. To active men there is no torture like indolence in a case like this, for indolence is the advance picket of despair.

But each couple, though eager for their turn of toil, were glad enough to quit it at the appointed time. Water driven from the body in perspiration makes its want more keenly felt within. The burning thirst was aggravated by exercise. Alec, being sparely built, perhaps suffered least; I, a thirsty soul, ever given to quaffing what was offered, endured ten men's agony. Indeed, as evening drew near, I began to fear that before another watch had run out, madness or death must be the end of me.

My time, however, was not yet come. As the sun went down in the west its dying glory lit upon a sail that peeped above the southern water-line. With frenzied effort we made for it, and feared that the darkness would come down before we could reach it.

As we drew nearer we made out that she was a carrack. The breeze which brought her up had lagged behind, and she had run into a belt of calm.

Relaxing our efforts not one whit we pushed fiercely on, urging the boat with Titan's strokes, for we were no gaunt, famine-worn spectres, no starvelings of the ocean who had been eking out a day's pittance to make it last over ten. In bodily health we were all hale and hearty, and as good men as we were the day before—save for the mad thirst which consumed us. But that is a madness beside which all other emotions sink to nothing; passion and prudence alike die when the thirst-rage touches them. Urged by it we would have charged an army, or have fled from one man; and so double-banking our oars we tore towards the carrack.

That she was Spanish from truck to tiller mattered nothing. Her people, clustered on the decks in armed suspicion, could not stop us. "Water! Agua!" we cried at them hoarsely. We cared for nothing else.

We climbed on board, and the Spaniards stayed their hands; some because they feared to provoke desperate men, some through pity, and others because they knew that when our burning throats were cooled, we must yield at discretion. Regardless of the hostile crowd, we rushed to the scuttlebutt. Parched, faint, panting, we deemed the tepid water a nectar fit for the gods, and the green slime whose tendrils clung to the dipper, the sweetest essence man's palate could be tickled with. We drank, and we drank; and forgot in the satisfaction of the moment that the world held other evil things besides thirst.

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But there was one at hand who would remind us. A tall, handsome Spaniard came forward from the crowd and stood before us. He saw what we had suffered, and he was pleased. And when those handsome lips parted in a smile, a double row of cruel, yellow teeth shone out between them.

Our old enemy's turn had come again—we were the prisoners of Don Miguel del Cassamoro.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE "BRISTOL MERCHANT"

THE burning circle of sun-baked sea from which we had escaped was strangely like a vast frying-pan; and now, having got out of that, we were perilously near finding ourselves in the fire. Don Miguel was carrying us to Spain as a present for the Inquisition, for even his vengeful cruelty could invent for us no more malignant fate.

Had he known that the plunder of the galleon, together with other booty, lay snugly hidden on a lonely island, under the guard of a crippled dotard, doubtless his eastward voyage would have been broken. He would have been charmed, too—now that the tables were so effectually turned—to renew his acquaintance with the Old Man, his former gaoler, for thus the auto-da-fé he pictured would have another actor. But he believed that all our gains lay fathoms deep on the sea bottom, with the ill-fated Scourge, and we would not agitate his well-balanced mind by undeceiving him.

Don Miguel did not put us in irons in the hold, though some of his underlings suggested it. No, he remembered the time when he was our unwilling hewer of wood and drawer of water, and he pre-

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pared to pay back some of his debts in kind. We were made to ply our craft as mariners whenever our services were wanted, and for the rest of the time we were the slaves of anyone who chose to command us.

Every dirty job in the ship fell to the heretical Englishmen's share, and a curse or a blow was the payment. And though the gorge of one of us would now and again rise, and a mutinous refusal tremble on his tongue, his mates would bid him knuckle under, grin if he could, and bide his time.

"A coward's blows never forget their father," Willie Trehalion would mutter prophetically.

"Ay, uncle, an' curses come home to roost," his nephew Job would chuckle in reply.

And so we passed down along the main, living like pariah dogs in the waking hours, and sleeping with bare deck planks for mattress, the night mists for coverlet, and the heavens for canopy overhead.

Outwardly no band of unfortunates was ever more numbed by despair, more hopelessly reconciled to an irrevocable fate. To the don's eyes we were meek and submissive as Indians, going about our labours mechanically; and if we did not show great interest in each task, at least we performed it effectively. We were careful not to court suspicion by excess of zeal, while we avoided additional tyranny by steady obedience.

But we meant to escape. The carrack should never set us on Spanish ground. We would fire her powder-room sooner, and perish with the rest of her crew in one overwhelming holocaust. Any death was preferable to the mercies of the Holy Inquisition.

But as yet its terrors were far away; and in the meanwhile we lived in hope that the chapter of accidents would unravel the coil in which we had entangled ourselves.

The pilot left the carrack at the most easterly point of Trinidad, and then, bidding good-bye to domestic navigation, we set out on the ocean voyage. For two days we beat tack and tack against easterly winds, sagging to leeward like a haystack, and making hardly any headway. Then for three days the wind chopped round fair, and we sped easily along our course. But after the third morning had passed the barren plain of ocean began to haze over, and as the thickness increased the breeze died away, till at last the carrack lay motionless in the calm of a dense fog.

No one thought much of it, as fog is a mariner's common experience; and we English, huddled together on the forecastle head, hailed it as a respite from the evil ahead.

Night came, and the grey twilight of the afternoon changed to inky blackness. All of us were asleep, tired out with the exertions of the day, and glad to snatch a little rest.

Suddenly Alec and I were aroused by a warning touch of Willie Trehalion's hook.

"Listen!" he whispered.

A strange sound came to us out of the blackness,

a sound that was half wail, half howl, but wholly weird and awful.

"A water-pixie," said I, trembling.

"Sea wolves," said one of the men, who had raised himself on his elbow to listen. "They're scenting prey. We're in for a fearful storm, or they wouldn't be there. Sea wolves never hunts without a kill."

The sound made itself heard again—a "wa-a-o-o-w" rising doleful in the still night air, and dying away into nothing with unutterable mournfulness.

"A water-pixie beyond doubt," said I again.

"A water fiddlestick!" replied the boatswain contemptuously. "That cry comes from no creature what breathes through gills. It's my old cat, an' that's his night song. D'ye think I wouldn't know his voice among a thousand? Old Nep—you'll mind him, Master Topp?"

I shook my head. "The night mist has got into your brain, Willie. You must be mistaken here," said I.

"Mebbe it's Nep's ghost that's hailing, uncle."

"Nep's ghost be hanged!" replied the boatswain irritably, turning on this last speaker. "Hold your tongue, Job, an' let others speak that has sense."

"But if it is Nep, Willie?"

"This; if that's Nep, why, then, it's the Bristol Merchant, too. Think a minute; why shouldn't it be her? Those on board couldn't be expected to wait for us up the great river till the crack o' doom. The three years that Cap'n Ireland told them to bide there is up long ago, an' so, believing that

we're all swallowed up in the wilderness, they're making the best o' their way home wi' the news. Besides—listen again—there! I'd stake my hand on it that's Nep's voice. And as Nep would never desert the *Bristol Merchant* we must just try an' frighten the dons into setting us adrift. We'll maybe fall between two stools; but, anyway, it's our best chance."

"If we can do it," said Alec, "but-"

"Trust me to manage it, Cap'n Ireland," interrupted Willie. "I've a weapon in mouth that would frighten the very soul out of a Spaniard, if the devil bred Spaniards wi' souls. Ask Master Topp; he knows what I can do. Look at 'em now! fearsome o' the darkness, they've lit a score o' lanterns, and are clustered together like a flock o' sheep, a-wringing their yaller hands an' calling upon their saints to save 'em. Fools! See, there's the priest come up up wi' bell, book, and candle to exorcise the evil spirit. An' there's his acolyte, holding a graven image over the bulwarks an' near dropping it in the sea wi' fright. Now's our time. Now or never. And markee, my lads: out-Spaniard the most Spanish o' them in trembling. If it's laughter that makes your limbs shake, never mind; the dirty hounds are too scared to know the difference."

And whispering further directions to Alec, he led him away, and the rest of us dropped down the ladders and mingled with the trembling group in the waist.

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Again the melancholy "Wa-a-o-o-w" floated to us out of the darkness, and Alec stepping forth into the lantern light clapped a cupped hand to his ear, and cried, "Listen! There's someone hailing from the masthead."

"Give ear to my Lord of the Sea," cried a high, cracked voice from aloft; and another from the mainyard arm shrieked, "He comes alongside!"

Then as though from the waters close-to came a third voice, deep and resonant, which asked what ship that was.

"Who hails, and by what right does he question?" cried Don Miguel.

"I am Neptune, Lord of the Sea," returned the voice. "What ship is that?"

A look of perplexity came into Don Miguel's face, and the rest of the Spaniards shook with fear.

Neptune was impatient.

"What ship is that? Answer me, miserable mortal! Know you not that I have power to pull your puny bark timber from timber, and to carry your carcases away to batten my sea-wolves in their caverns amongst the weed-jungle below?"

"I fear neither sea-god nor sea-devil," began the commandant boldly; but the priest interrupted him, saying in a whisper, that it was best to temporise with the powers of darkness sometimes. And then, with a muttered anathema between every sentence, he answered Neptune's questions himself.

"What cargo?" queried the Lord of the Sea. The priest told him.

- "What passengers?"
- "Thirty; of whom seven are women and three infants."
 - "And what crew?"
 - "A hundred and sixty, most potent."
- "No more? Methinks there's some few yet untold. Old ocean hath a queer flavour hereabouts."
- "There are eleven prisoners, English sailors who are working a passage to the offices of the Holy Inquisition in Spain."
- "What!" bellowed Neptune. "Heretics on one of His Most Catholic Majesty's ships! Heretics at large and unshackled! Thunder and tempests, I'll destroy the whole lot o' ye!"

And so the farce went on, until at length the trembling Spaniards, finding that their crossings and paternosters were useless, began to look upon us as so many Jonahs. Their saints were forgotten, and they were for heaving us overboard at once.

But Neptune would not allow it.

"Pollute not my sweet brine with the foul bodies of Englishmen," he warned them. "Set them adrift in a boat, and then my sister's chickens, which feed on carrion, will have the wherewithal to flesh their hungry beaks."

Don Miguel would have prevented this, for he alone out of his ship's company doubted Neptune's genuineness, but the others would not listen to him. Tackles were rigged with lightning speed, a boat was heaved out from the booms and lowered, and

we were shoved down to it willy-nilly, protesting vigorously in obedience to Willie's whispered command. They would give us neither food nor water, neither compass nor sail—nothing, in fact, but curses; and bidding us shove off, threatened to quicken us with a saker-shot if we did not hurry out of reach.

We pulled on till the babel of voices on the carrack had died away, and then, judging we were out of earshot of the dons, Willie Trehalion gave a peculiar whistle, low and tremulous. A slight breeze had sprung up, and after a moment's pause a faint sepulchral "Wa-a-o-o-w" was wafted to us over the stern.

Round spun the boat, and willing backs, straining at the oars, sent her darting in the direction of the sound. Presently the rigging and hull of a brig loomed through the fog, and a voice hailed to bid us keep our distance.

"Bristol Merchant, ahoy! We're your own mates."

"Sheer off, or I'll sink you. Ye're pirates, that's what y'are. Our mates is all swalley'd up by the wilderness, or took by Spaniards. Sheer off, I tell ye!"

"You've a black cat aboard there," bawled Willie Trehalion impatiently, "a black cat sailing under the name o' Nep, haven't ye?"

"Mebbe we have, mebbe we hav'n't. I baint a'goin' to argy wi' ye. Sheer off an' ha' done. There's a Spaniard away there through the fog. Go

and plunder him. We ain't got the value of a jack o' ale amongst us."

"Wait a minute," said Willie Trehalion. "See if Nep won't remember his old shipmaster's call." And the boatswain repeated his low whistle.

"Wa-a-o-ow, me-ear-wa-ow," came shrill and distinct across the water.

"Well, I'm blamed!" exclaimed a fresh voice.

"Ef that ain't Willie Trehalion, et's his ghost.

Nep'll answer to noan o' us, ill-conditioned ole varmint as 'e is."

"Nep don't forget his old master, if his old master's shipmates do. Now I'm telling 'ee true, there's Cap'n Ireland here, an' Master Topp, an' just a han'ful o' others, all that is escaped out o' this murderin' land. An' now, blest if our own mates will own us, though we've got gould enough stored up to buy Bristol city with."

"Pull a stroke or two nearer," bawled the first speaker, and then added to those beside him, "and you lads blow your matches up ready to fire. There's witchcraft enough in that blamed old cat to get the whole lot of us into trouble yet. Boat ahoy there! Rest on yer oars again, an' advance nearer at your peril. Strike a light an' let's look at yer faces."

"We have nothing to strike a light with," broke out Alec angrily. "Man alive, the boat's not provisioned for a voyage. She's as bare as Willie Trehalion's head. We've just escaped from the Spaniard yonder, and are absolutely unarmed. Come, I know you well enough; you are Martin Snale, whom I left in command."

"Mebbe I be, an' mebbe I baint," replied the man, cautiously. "No disrespect to you, Cap'n Ireland, if you be Cap'n Ireland, but I'll just make sure before you come any nearer that a lantern's light won't shine through'ee. The voices is all right, but they say that sperrits keeps the voices after the body's shelled off on 'em, and I ain't a-going to 'ave no ghosts aboard me."

Alec stood up to be inspected. A great horn-windowed lantern was thrust out on the end of a boat-hook, and Martin Snale, climbing into the main rigging, made a penthouse of his two hands and peered at us from under them. The fog was thick, the tallow dip flickered badly, and Martin's wits were sluggish, consequently he was very long in coming to a decision. At the end of nearly ten minutes' scrutiny he stepped down from his perch, and bidding us remain where we were disappeared for a while. Presently he returned, and scrambling into the shrouds again bawled out afresh:—

"You looks all right; solid enough, too, I don't deny. But when a man's been a mariner all the years I have, he learns that looks is sometimes deceiving. So I'll just make so bold as to heave this orange at one o' ye, to see whether it hits anything solid enough to burst it. If it does ye can come aboard."

He lifted his hand and threw. The yellow fruit flying through the air was stopped by Willie

Trehalion's bald pate. The boatswain never winced, and apparently the sight of the scattered pulp and juice—the orange was an over-ripe one—streaming down his stolid face was sufficient. Martin Snale demanded no more tests, and we climbed up the round barrel side of our own old brig, the *Bristol Merchant*.

There was but one thing which lessened our delight at meeting in freedom our old shipmates once more. We could not have the satisfaction of letting Don Miguel know how we had fooled him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE OLD MAN'S SECRET

THREE months had elapsed since the Sourge sailed from Cave Island when the Bristol Merchant drew in between the harbour heads.

Directly she rounded the spit, a glance told those who knew the spot that something was wrong. All the works raised by English hands had been ruthlessly destroyed. Weeds were growing amongst a few charred stumps on the shore; and on the platform above, there was rank tropical jungle in place of our snug trim-built dwellings beneath the palm grove.

A falconet shot roused speech from the cliffs, but brought no reply from human voice. The echoes died away, the screaming sea-fowl settled down again, and silence once more brooded over the island.

We began to feel uneasy forebodings of ill. The Old Man could scarcely be deaf to such a summons were he anywhere in the neighbourhood. True, he might have wandered to the other side of the island. But we dared not think it. His lameness made him loth to walk unnecessarily, and for food he would not require to go far afield.

The vessel in which we returned was, it is true,

as different in every point from the Scourge as she well could be, but our spars and rigging were gay with English ensigns, and the voices which hailed the shore without answer were English every one. Had the Old Man been at hand he would not have failed to recognise them.

With sinking hearts we ran down sail and anchored, and then, putting ashore, looked about us in a sad dismay. Wanton destruction was everywhere. Not a stick or a stone of any of our works had been left untouched. The Philistines had come down upon the stronghold whilst its guards were away. And what Philistines could there be in these seas save Spaniards?

We approached the cave. Small hope that the rich harvest stored in that garner would be overlooked by such greedy foragers as the fellow-countrymen of those who had originally reaped it! Indeed, the splintered woodwork of the doors and partitions showed plainly enough where the ravishers had been at work.

Collecting bundles of resinous faggots for torches, we passed through the shattered portal and hurried across the great main hall, lit by the sunlight through its crannied roof, away over the dry flooring of silvery sand which had once formed bed and table for our troop of slaves, running eagerly along till we reached the narrow arch which gave entrance to the gloomy windings of the abysses beyond.

Stopping for a moment to light the torches, we advanced again, splashing through the chilly stream

which issued from we knew not what darksome recess of the great labyrinth, and now eddied and gurgled round our knees; sheltering the smoky torch flames from the tricklets that would have dropped kisses on them from the roof; scrambling through clammy mud baths, and struggling over wet, shiny boulders. Onwards we pressed into the very bowels of the island, skirting black, bottomless pools and shivering quicksands. But everywhere we saw the tracks of the countless feet that had been before us. Ever and again they wandered off into some unknown depth of the maze, but as invariably returned to the track which we now followed, the track which led to the treasure chamber.

Miles and miles must the Spanish plunderers have traversed among these unknown windings, and dogged indeed the perseverance which carried them through to the end. But at last the clustered footprints reached a narrow aisle that had no turning; and we knew then that the robbers had reached their goal.

At this point Alec, the boatswain, and all the Scourge's crew except Job Trehalion, turned back. They were satisfied that further advance was useless, and wished to spare themselves the mortification of seeing the empty vault where once their wealth had been banked.

Perhaps it was mere idle curiosity which led me on, and perhaps it was a wish to show the new-comers what a store there had been waiting for us and them. Anyhow, I followed Job Trehalion into the darkness.

The path ran by the side of a deep, water-filled, gully. It terminated in a small, domed chamber, the only entrance into which was through a narrow arch which the stream more than half closed. here had been our treasury. In this water-guarded vault we had deposited the pouches of pearls and the chests of coin won at the cost of so much good English blood. Now not a leathern bag nor a wooden case remained. The Spaniards had ruthlessly taken our all.

But there was in the place where our store had lain, a sight which made my muscles quake with chilling horror. Supported by a niche in the rock sat a skeleton, pointing its bony fingers at my breast, and grinning at me with half-toothed fleshless ʻiaws.

I had almost trodden on its outstretched shanks, when the fitful light of the torches falling on the whitened bones, revealed its ghastly presence. Mine was not the nervous start of a coward. Heaven knows, I had seen too many dead men in the flesh, and in the bone, too, for that matter, to quail at the sight of a mere piece of cold humanity. Had the skeleton been naked I might have taken it for that of a Spaniard, and have given it no more than a careless glance in passing. But there was that about it which told me whose body it had once supported. Around the bony lattice of its ribs hung a mouldering leather jerkin, once gaudy with slashings and lace, but now mildewed over with a soft grev fur. It was the Old Man's. I had seen

him change it from a dead Spaniard's back to his own, and knew that he had worn it ever since. And if other evidence was wanted, it was there in the broken and distorted bones of leg and wrist. It needed no wizard to read the writings of the Inquisition's clemency.

Job Trehalion shared my knowledge, and for a while gazed with me in silent horror. The others clustered curiously round, wondering why a mere bag of twisted bones should so affect us.

At length Job found his voice. "Master Topp," he whispered hoarsely, "d'ye note the Old Man's outstretched hand? He's built a wall o' mud an' pebbles for it to lie on."

"Yes," said I. "It seems a curious freak. But he was always strange and eccentric in his doings."

"The Old Man never did aught without an object, Master Topp. His brain might take after his legs in bein' a bit crooked, but it were a clever brain for all that, 'specially when there was Spaniards to be diddled. Let's see where the finger points. up yer torches, lads. Ah! see there! Tell'd 'ee so, Master Topp! I knowed there'd be something."

And Job broke out into a great chuckle, which well-nigh ended in a sob.

"See," he went on, "there's writing on the wall, scratted in wi' a knob o' stone. Read it. Master Topp; I baint scholard enough to tell what it says."

"'Snake his trail,' is what is written, Job. It has neither rhyme nor reason."

"No, it ha'n't rhyme, that's true; though none

could turn a rhyme an' set it to a cheerful lilt like the Old Man, when he put his mind to it. But I warrant there's reason, though mebbe the nut's a hard un to crack."

"Like a date-stone, Job," I answered dejectedly.
"Hard to break, and no kernel when you've broken it."

"Well, Master Topp, it won't do no harm to tell Cap'n Ireland what was the last words as the Old Man wrote. An' now——"

"And now," I interrupted, "we must carry his poor bones back to daylight and give them a decent burial. So run back some of you and cut saplings for a litter."

"No need for a litter," said Job. "I've carried the Old Man living, whiles he'd laugh an' say I was his moke; an' I don't think as he'd ask other arms than Job Trehalion's to carry him dead."

And without another word he reverently and tenderly gathered up the shrivelled corpse and bore it in his arms to the shore. We performed the last obsequies, and put up a great slab of stone over the grave, on which Alec carved with a swordpoint, "Senex, hic jacet." And for two whole days Job Trehalion sat by the grave or wandered in the woods, alone; and during the whole time we remained on the island no man heard his laugh or saw his grin. It was a strange friendship which these two crazy ones had for one another.

After the burying was done, there was a great discussion about the meaning of the words which

the Old Man had written. Some thought they were mere wanderings of a diseased mind, while others maintained that they had a meaning, but that it was scarcely worth while to attempt to dive very deeply after it. Everyone had something to say. Alec alone remained silent, and ruffled his fingers thoughtfully through his shock of tangled red hair. I did not question him, but went to sleep trusting that his wits would work out some solution.

When the sun had scarcely risen, and the night mists were still waving lazily over the harbour, a hand was laid on my shoulder, and I awoke to find my sworn shipmate standing over me. He bade me slip on my clothes and come down to the shore with him.

- "Jack," he said, when we had reached a path leading to the plateau above, "what's a serpent's trail?"
- "The mark of its nasty slime on the ground, which shows where it has passed," I answered promptly.
 - "And what's a woodcock's trail?"
- "Its guts. You've eaten them many a time, and should know. But why?"
 - "Again, Jack. What's a serpent's trail now?"
- "Why, its insides, I suppose, if you will have it so," said I, not seeing in the least what he was steering for.
- "Good, Jack! You'll make a lawyer yet. And now, where shall we find our serpent?"
- "In the woods, if there are any, though I believe the island's free of them."

- "What do you say to a stone serpent?"
- "What, one of those at the Temple corners?"
- "Yes; the very one, perhaps, that you and Willie Trehalion turned into a bogie-house to frighten Spaniards. So stir your stumps, Jack, and perhaps we'll bring back some good news as sauce for breakfast." So away we walked together to the great temple on the black heights of the further cape of the island.

We reached the platform, stepped through the old opening, and mounted the stair in the serpent's body. Scrawled on one of the walls we found a great "W," whose meaning I was at a loss to guess.

Alec, however, as soon as he saw it, went down again, and made for the western corner of the temple. Here, after a lengthy search and careful sounding of the walls and floor, we discovered a loose slab of stone, and wrenching it up, descended to a chamber in the snake's gullet.

Sure enough there was more writing, and this time the meaning was quite plain.

"Look in the bole of the tree wherein the boar sheltered which gored Jan Pengony his thigh."

Now, fortunately, I had witnessed the incident referred to, and I thought I could lead the way to the tree. But it proved a long search, for my recollection of the place was not so clear as I had imagined; but after working through one thorny break after another without success, at last, when the sun had just passed its meridian, I spied the tree.

We rushed towards it with beating hearts.

The hollow was choked with sticks and leaves and such like rubbish; but this we clawed away with eager hands, and came at last upon a case-bottle bound in wicker. Peering down the neck Alec said he saw a parchment, and breaking the glass without more ado, found that the letter was addressed to himself. It was written on the back of an old ship's manifest, and this is how it ran:—

"DR. LAD,—The Day after thy Sourge sailed, a small coasting Brig hove-to off the Mouth of Harbour, and would have come in had I not hailed her with Threats. Whereupon she turned Tail. Judged her Master would tell his Mates, and bring them in Force. Bethought me how to dispose of Treasure. Schemed a Plan and executed it. To repeat same, follow Ravine at Foot of Temple Hill, and find a poised Rock across Torrent. Three-ply Block and Tackle shifts it. Cave beyond then dry, forming Treasure Chamber. Chests and pouches lie in it.

"Am about to die, but will serve thee even in dying. Being in such evil Case, and being known by none, not even by such old Shipmates as Trehalion, Senior, and Pengony, did not, through very Shame, own Kinship before, but now subscribe myself,

"Thy affectionate Father,
"HENRY IRELAND.

"Post Scriptum.—Will hand thee my Share of Treasure, Take as Co-legacy my Hate of Spaniards."

CHAPTER XXIX

CONCLUDING STRANDS

"Sail away,
Hack away,
Plunder! (Boom.)
Gather all the valuables you can.
Come back,
Nothing lack,
Thunder! (Boom.)
Scatter all the money like a man."

THE Bristol Merchant's anchor has kissed Severn mud once more, and Willie Trehalion's song—sung, roared, and shouted in every variety of voice and key—is rising from the throats of her brownfaced crew, and compelling attention on the wharves and landing-stages of Bristol city. Aye, and throughout the whole town, too, for the verses are pointed with the boom of a big gun, while the end of the song itself is marked by a whole broadside.

The years of adventure and peril have come to an end at last; and now before the quill is laid aside and the ugly, uncompromising word Finis is scrawled across the bottom of the last page, a few more dips in the ink-horn will enable Captain Alexander Ireland's brave lads to make their bow, and march off the stage with ensign and pennants flying. For John Topp prides himself on being too old a seaman to leave the strands of his yarn lying littered about the decks, but prefers instead to see them snugly moused and pointed to an end.

When the *Bristol Merchant* set out from the muddy Severn to seek adventure and gold in the far-away West, one hundred and one men, drunk and sober, had watched from her decks the black wavy line which marked the iron-bound coast of Devon, until it sank slowly beneath the horizon astern, and had then turned with hearts full of hope to follow the beckoning arms of the flashing sun as it dipped, all molten gold, into the waste of western waters. It was the beacon which told us that out there beyond the Atlantic rollers lay Manoa, the city whose streets were paved with gold.

Ah, but it lied! That golden glory of the sunset was a will-o'-the-wisp which led all but a few of those hundred and one brave men to their death. Manoa has never yet enriched by so much as a piece of eight the many bold adventurers who have sought it. Nor ever will; for, to my thinking at least, its golden wealth exists only in the hopes of the bold lads whom it leads to death. Aye, Manoa is but a dream city, and the story of Job Trehalion's tame pagan was but a Circe-song of death.

There are some men who can be happy only when they are doing and daring. To enjoy the rewards of adventure past and peril safely braved is to them impossible. Only sword in hand and in the sharp gasping of battle do they breathe easily, and believe that they really live. Now, I ask no better comrade than such a one, to stand by my side when the hot breath of a foe is surging in my face; but ashore in a tavern or at supper in a Bristol mercer's house, a man may have a more congenial comrade. Of this restless sort was my sworn shipmate, Alexander Ireland, and before a month's mud and rust had gathered on the Bristol Merchant's anchor flukes, he was at sea again, fighting in Captain Franky Drake's company against the enemies of England and Queen His father's legacy gave him funds and incentive; and before many months had passed, the Spanish mothers learned to use the terror of the great Captain Ireland's name to hush their fractious babes into silence. But of his deeds there is no need for me to tell; they are written in the story of England's fame.

Job Trehalion spent his prize-money in fourteen days, and then shipped for the Guinea coast, from which he has not yet returned. His uncle, after a shorter trial of dissipation, resolved to eschew the delights of sack and ale, and started a tavern to aid him in keeping his vow. The rest of the crew "scattered all their money like men," and then went afloat once more to collect a further supply for the same good purpose. It is the way of sailor men, and always will be.

But there is still one person in this tale of whose fate I have not told; and I had meant that there should be half-a-score more of chapters written to say how I sought her and won her. But she has read all

that I have written, and she refuses to form any further part in what she calls my tale of robbery and blood. If I wish to tell how I sought her at Vigo, and found that she had gone, and how I finally tracked her to a convent at Grenada and stole her from the ward of the nuns, then, says she, I must write another tale of that alone.

She is my wife; I have bought a roll of paper and a score of quills, and could write the tale with easy glibness, if it were permitted me. But, as I say, Inez is my wife now, and so she must be obeyed.

FINIS.

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